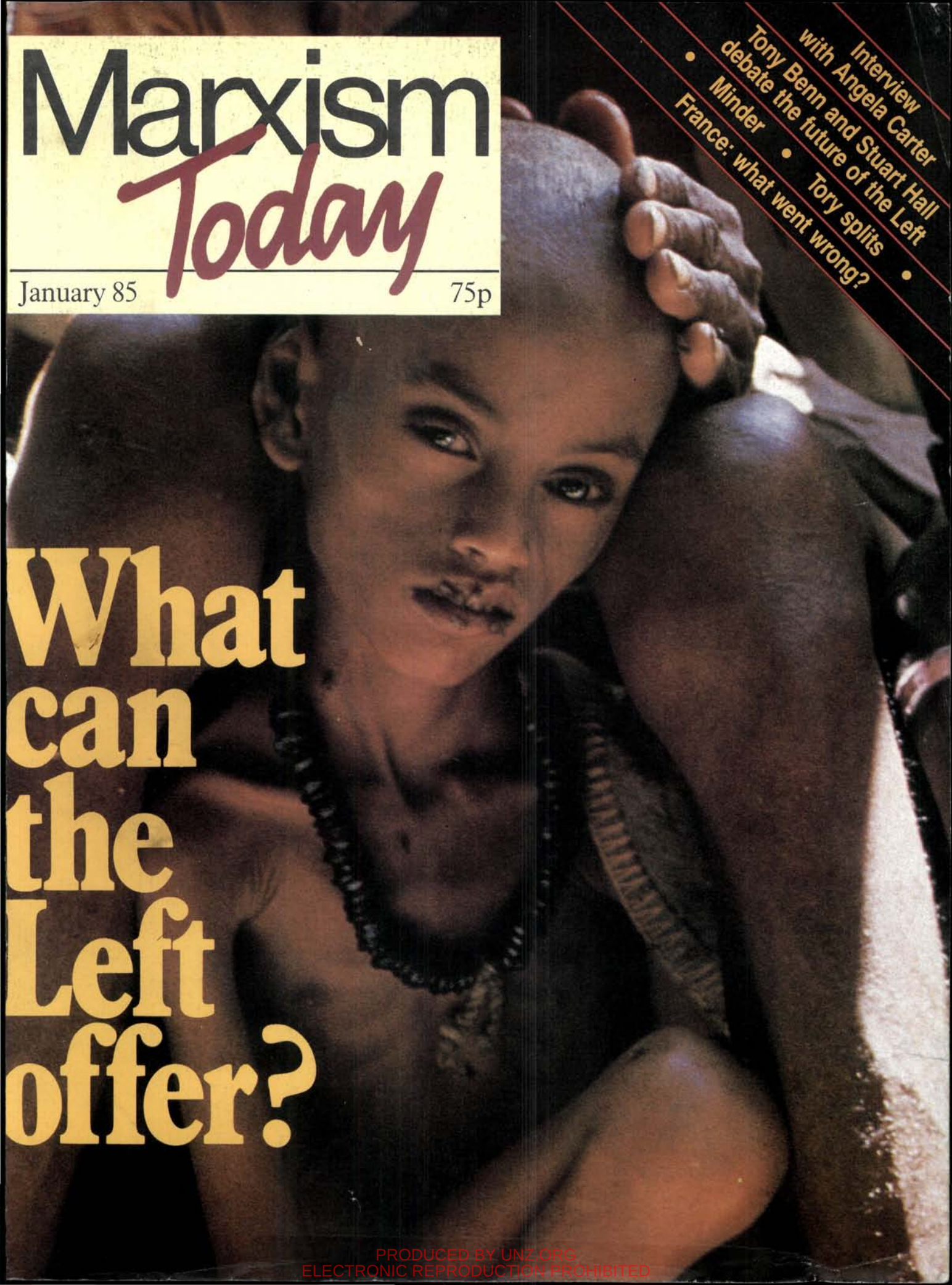

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Marxism

Theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party

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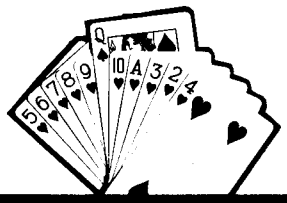

A TORY REVOLUTION

Is there a Tory revolution (or at least a palace coup) in the making against Mrs Thatcher and her policies? Or is the unrest in the Tory Party an inevitable consequence of a large Commons majority, with many MPs surprised to find themselves in the House in the first place and therefore not too bothered about party loyalty, and others feeling increasingly frustrated in their political careers?

The Tories' three-figure majority helps explain the frequency of recent backbench rebellions. The whips' demands for unstinting loyalty are simply that much less compelling. And as the lifetime of this parliament ticks by, the minds of younger Tories are filled less with thoughts of gratitude at being swept into Westminster on Mrs Thatcher's coat-tails and more with the horror of trying to hold on at the next election.

But the cause of Tory unease lies deeper. It represents more than a mere coalition of nervous newcomers and unrepentant wets. On different issues, all vintages of Tory, from very young to very old, and all shades of opinion, from very left to ultra-right, have rebelled or spoken out. Criticism has become less coded and more heavyweight, even establishment, with former prime ministers Lord Stockton and Edward Heath echoing the concern of the bishops at the risk being taken with Britain's social cohesion.

But how serious is the threat to Thatcher? This must depend first on the depth of concern within the party, and secondly on the extent to which her Tory critics can agree on what should be done and how skilfully they play their hand.

On the first count, there is real reason for Thatcher to be worried. Tory confidence has been badly shaken on both economic policy and the Government's competence. Unemployment increased sharply through the summer months – exactly the period when according to Chancellor Lawson's bullish election-time forecast dole queues would start to shrink. Disquiet was voiced amongst the party faithful at the Brighton conference, although that was soon forgotten in the shock of the bombing. Through the autumn the protracted miners' dispute and the Tory lead in the polls helped ease the pressure on Thatcher, but unemployment is now the main concern of the vast majority of Tory MPs.

At the same time the Government has contrived to appear especially insensitive and to antagonise the party's natural supporters, eg, by announcing cuts in overseas aid when every night the TV screens show the dead and dying in the Ethiopian famine; by proposing a sudden hike in parents' contributions to students' fees and grants; by curbing local Tory grandees' powers and ambitions through rate-capping the shires and scrapping the GLC; and by suggesting that tax relief on pension contributions should end. Rare indeed is the Tory MP who thinks it prudent to assault the consciences and the pockets of the middle-class when the party looks likely to need every scrap of support from its natural supporters in a few years' time.

But what are the chances of a change?

There's no chance at all of a change of leader. Thatcher's most plausible challenger, Francis Pym, goes out of his way to emphasise that this is not what he is about. He knows that at this stage in the parliament he would not stand a cat in hell's chance against

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a two-time election winner. Pym is also a Tory to his finger-tips, who knows the mores of his party well enough to realise that if the battle was personalised, he and his fellow critics would instantly be branded as disloyal, the cardinal Tory sin. So the Pym line is to praise Thatcher while urging a change in approach, with the avowed aim of improving Tory (and Thatcher) election prospects.

What are the chances of a change in policy?

On the face of it the critics' lack of organisation is a weakness: the disinclination of the wets to organise is said to have caused their downfall. But there's the risk in the Tory Party of being seen to 'cabal', which again leaves any critics open to the fatal charge of disloyalty. However in the November elections for the officers of the party backbench committees, left challengers came within a few votes of unseating the right-wing chairmen of the key Finance and Trade and Industry committees.

The lack of political coherence is also an apparent problem. Many Tories, despite the Thatcher revolution, are not really interested in political philosophies. But their pragmatic concern with winning means that they are not too encumbered with scruples once they decide something has to be done.

A consensus is now emerging on the backbenches that more should be done to tackle unemployment through spending on education and training and on infrastructure, such as roads and housing. Many would support a modest reflation, up to £3bn of extra borrowing, but well short of the old 'wet' demands.

The Chancellor could defuse much backbench criticism by concentrating his £1½bn or more of tax cuts on taking low earners out of the tax net altogether. Reductions in the scale of national insurance contributions and more schemes to help the unemployed would also help hold the Thatcher line.

A clever budget might buy Thatcher more time and restore some confidence amongst Tories in ministers' competence. But it cannot reverse the shift in attitude in the centre of the party since the summer, where scepticism has replaced a readiness to take policy on trust. Tories are anxiously looking for the policy to deliver the goods, ie, less unemployment. A change of tack looks more likely later in 1985 rather than sooner, but don't expect Tories to admit that it's happening when it comes. The real crunch will come with the next economic downturn as unemployment accelerates from around its present level.

Rob Shepherd

● MARCOS IN A MESS

The Philippine dictatorship of President Ferdinand Marcos has always been one of the United States' staunchest allies in the South-east Asian region. The country is an ex-colony of the US and the location of several important air and naval bases there means that the Americans have a special interest in maintaining a sympathetic regime. In recent times, however, Marcos has come under widespread domestic pressure to relinquish power as the society has been wracked by political and economic crisis.

The catalyst for the upsurge of anti-Marcos political activity on the domestic front was the assassination by the military, on 21 August 1983, of Benigno Aquino, a leader of the official 'Opposition'. Aquino, a self-confessed CIA collaborator, had returned to the Philippines in an attempt, strongly supported by the US State Department, to force the pace of a peaceful return to bourgeois democratic government. The extent of popular support for the anti-Marcos forces has meant that he was unable to whitewash the Aquino killing and was also unable to rig the May 1984 elections with the same ease as on earlier occasions, especially in Manila.

But while the assassination was the catalyst, the root cause of the political crisis has been a deepening economic crisis – most starkly manifested in the size of the Philippine external debt, which now stands at US$25.6 billion, about $15 billion of which had to be rescheduled in 1984. Much of the debt was brought about by government-guaranteed loans and lavish spending of Marcos's 'cronies' – a group of wealthy Filipinos whose fortunes have been augmented since he came to power by a combination of corruption, manipulating the open nature of the economy and unstinting support given to the regime by the US and international agencies like the World Bank and IMF.

Now, the economic failures as well as the Marcos regime's appalling record on human rights have led the US government to throw considerable support behind the Opposition – a loose coalition of wealthy and middle class Filipinos who share both the concern of the Americans at the growing economic instability and a fear of the political instability among workers and peasants which is provoked as much by the actions of Marcos' military supporters as by genuine communist insurgents.

Measures to be taken by the government in an IMF package announced last October are unlikely to relieve the economic pressure on several important sections of society. Marcos' 'cronies' should be hit by the combination of new taxes on luxury spending and the closing of several lucrative avenues of tax evasion and easy finance. However, it is workers in the manufacturing sector, especially those catering to the domestic market, who will continue to be worst affected. The shortage of foreign exchange to buy raw materials has forced the closure of many local firms and workers in these industries have suffered wage cuts and short-time work offers or outright unemployment. Workers in the much faster-growing export-oriented industries are less severely affected, but even here, slackening Western demand and competition from other low-wage countries has caused a slow-down. Marcos responded to the problems of manufacturing by banning strikes in the so-called 'vital industries' and, combined with the constant threat of unemployment, this has helped to ensure that real wages for Filipino workers fell by an astonishing 50% between 1970 and 1980.

The extent of American involvement – in helping to create the present crisis through their complicity with the Marcos dictatorship and now in blatantly intervening to force changes in the economy, if not in the government itself – has angered large numbers of Filipinos outside the official Opposition. Apart from the industrial workers who are only recently finding a political voice, the bulk of the anti-imperialist forces have been made up of the rank and file of the Catholic Church. Christians have tended to ally, in the rural areas, with the guerillas of the New People's Army – giving the latter an unexpected channel to the outside world and boosting the prestige and finances of a movement which, hitherto, was confined to a few outer islands, away from the mainstream of Philippine development. (Many of the alleged incidents involving 'communists' of the NPA are in fact staged by government soldiers who thereby increase their bonuses.)

The communist movement in the Philippines is divided. The 'Old' Party (PKP) was based in Central Luzon (the area of the Huk Rebellion in the 1950s), but is organising increasingly among industrial workers. The 'New' Party (PCP) has the NPA as its military wing and has, in consequence, accepted Christians onto its Central Committee. It appears that the influence of the Church has largely replaced the PCP's former links with China. The Christian presence also extends wider than that of the PCP (especially in Manila) and their leadership in the struggle

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against US bases in the country has given the Americans some cause for alarm.

But the official Opposition is also very fragmented – as it was even when Aquino was alive. The problem for the Filipino ruling class and the Americans will be to find a new leader acceptable, not only to the competing factions of the Opposition, but to Marcos' military backers. The Americans are unlikely to give support to direct military rule except as a last resort – if only because Marcos and the military have proved unable to manage the economy successfully – and they will exert heavy pressure on the factions to come together. Ironically, one of the names most frequently mentioned as a possible successor is Cesar Virata, the present Prime Minister and Finance Minister. Although a long-serving member of the Marcos government, Virata is not associated with the wilder excesses of 'crony' capitalism.

In the short term, with American assistance, the transition to a parliamentary-type regime can probably be managed. In the longer run, the success of this transition will depend on the ability of the new regime to overcome the economic crisis and to blunt the radical edge of the Church by improvements in human rights and social justice.

Melanie Beresford

● RUNNING RINGS AROUND LONDON

The final links in the M25 motorway which encircles London some 20 miles from its centre are due to be completed in 1986. But already some of its effects are becoming clear – as is the enormity of the planning battles which loom ahead.

There is no doubt that the road will bring some real improvements in travel times and traffic congestion. It will be quicker to get from the Midlands and North to the South coast. It will be quicker to get from Heathrow to Gatwick, and from Staines to Brentwood, for instance. And there will certainly be benefits in some parts of London as through traffic is now diverted round the capital. On the negative side, however, there are those – like the British Road Federation – who argue that the road will, as has happened so often before, generate so much new road traffic (for instance, by taking it away from British Rail) that it will soon be a traffic jam all of its own. Essex and Kent have already given notice that they will refuse to co-operate in building the extra Dartford Tunnel which will be needed in only a few years.

Moreover, there will, of course, be increased traffic in the area surrounding the M25 itself, relating both to the traffic coming on and off the motorway and to the new development which is likely to be attracted.

This second set of impacts, on development and environment, could produce a most extraordinary political alliance. The M25 will increase the drain of jobs from central London. Warehouses and factories needing access to the national road transport system, office employers which will draw on workers commuting round the city on the new road, hypermarkets and superstores at intersections with massive catchment areas, and high-tech industry seeking rural retreats, but with access to London and the airports, all are likely to be attracted to the M25 rather than inner London. It is difficult to see how the road can do other than hasten London's employment decline.

At the same time, it will intensify the development pressures in the areas around the interchanges of the M25. This process is already underway. Developers have been getting excited about the prospects of good pickings for years now, and land prices have already risen dramatically.

At the inner end of this process, there are the Labour GLC and inner London boroughs, at the outer end Tory shire and local councils. And none of them want it to happen. In inner London the collapse of jobs is one of the main preoccupations of every local authority, and employment policies are now on the agenda in these areas in a way they have never been before. The concerns in the area of the M25 itself are in complete contrast. Just about every bit of the motorway has been fought, and almost every planning authority is now determined to resist major developments. The demands of property investors are increasingly coming into head-on conflict with planning authorities anxious to preserve the Green Belt. Environment ministers' tentative suggestions that development restrictions in the Green Belt might be relaxed were greeted with outrage, and the minister backed off. Present central government statements are ambiguous – definite commitments to the maintenance of the Green Belt are followed by statements urging local authorities to respond 'positively' to pressures for development.

There are undoubtedly those in these areas who need jobs and who are less concerned about the preservation of their environment and their (residential) capital assets, but on balance the M25 seems set massively to reinforce a process which is viewed with dismay by the local people and local authorities affected. There could be some odd gangings-up. The GLC already

strongly supports the Green Belt, and in a paper to the Town and Country Planning Association on the impact of the M25 in Surrey, a chief planning officer was quite clear: 'We are also very concerned to make decisions which support the aims of the GLC in the rehabilitation of their areas'! In any case, there are some major planning battles still to be fought over the degree of impact the new road will be allowed to have.

And it is not just the shift from inner London to beyond the metropolitan area which the M25 will reinforce. It also looks set in the longer term to exacerbate the growth of the West and the decline of the East of the capital. The only planning authorities *not* resisting development pressures as a result of the motorway are those along the Thames East of London. Here there is little Green Belt and lots of unemployment. But it is precisely here, of course, that employers are least likely to want to locate. The big pressures will be in the south, the north west and, of course, in the so-called 'golden triangle' from Heathrow down the M4 corridor.

All this leads us into wider issues. For it is precisely this area which is already leading the country in terms of jobs and prosperity and, while there has certainly been substantial expenditure on road building elsewhere, the M25 can only serve to reinforce this leading position. There is a growing awareness of the way in which public spending

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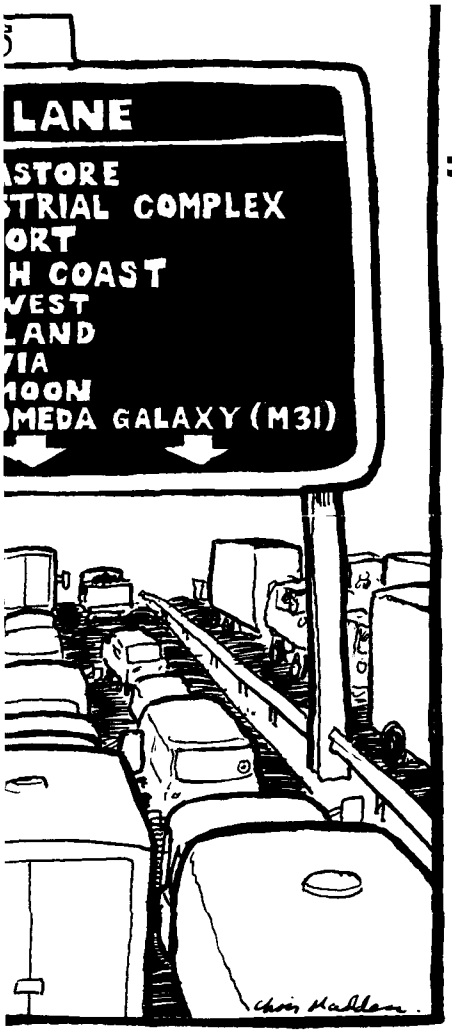

illustration Chris Madden

programmes not viewed as part of regional policy can have implications for regional development which far outweigh the effects of regional policy itself. And the 'golden triangle' has benefitted from massive public expenditure on infrastructure and defence.

Indeed, the whole public-private issue is central to the debate over roads. London itself has comparatively few motorway-standard roads. That in itself was a result of local political victories. But it could be argued that building the M25 alone is the worst of all worlds in terms of decentralisation for it leaves the city congested while allowing freer movement on the periphery. This argument begs a few questions. Which of the major conurbations with highly developed motorway systems have managed to avoid decentralisation? And is building roads anyway the best way of reducing congestion?

Lying behind all this is the wider argument between roads and private transport, on the one hand, and public transport on the other. Public expenditure is being shifted from buses, tubes and rail and towards private cars and lorries. The recent commitment by transport minister Nicholas Ridley to explore ways of reducing congestion in inner London is hard to take seriously. The almost universal assumption is that the outcome will be more roads. The one proven method is reducing public transport fares, but at the same time we have been served with an announcement that London fares are to go up. Integral to this policy is an erosion of local democratic control. The reformed Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment has no local authority representation while the abolition of the GLC would deliver up to central government control over key roads in its strategy.

So, who gains? The road lobby and road builders, property developers, and land and property investors, the consultants who provide the endless studies, and private sector industry in general, as its every changing locational whim is pandered to with new infrastructure, while the public purse picks up the bill for both providing for greenfield growth and mopping up the social dereliction which is left behind.

Doreen Massey and Richard Meegan

● ALLIANCE FOR SCIENCE

The launch of the Alliance for Science last month marks the first serious trade union initiative on science policy for many years. It comprises the three trade unions primarily responsible for organising scientific research staff – the Association of Scientific, Managerial and Technical Staffs (ASTMS), the Institution of Professional Civil Servants (IPCS) and the Association of University Teachers (AUT). The campaign is for an increased research and development effort in Britain, with more open decision-making, trade union involvement and a co-ordinated national science strategy. The formation of the Alliance creates a potential focus for the promotion of an effective and socially relevant policy for science. This has been absent among unionised scientists and technologists since the demise of the Association of Scientific Workers in the 1960s.

Cooperation amongst scientific and technical workers on R&D policy has been hindered by divisions over the allocation of resources to different sectors of science and in particular the number of jobs dependent on military research projects. The breakthrough was finally achieved at the 1984 Trades Union Congress when the pressures of government laboratory cutbacks, the financial squeeze on universities and Research Councils, and the impact of the recession on industrial research combined to generate a new urgency for sinking differences and agreeing a common policy. In addition the low profile of the trade unions was increasingly an embarrassment as establishment figures from science and industry became more vocal in their criticisms of government science and technology policy.

So, for example, the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology embraces many of the policy advisers forged in the white heat of Harold Wilson's scientific and technological revolution more recently tempered by allegiance to the SDP. It has pushed vigorously for a more serious, coordinated and open approach by government to scientific research. This has been reinforced by outspoken criticisms of current policies for industry and technology by industrialists such as Sir Kenneth Corfield.

The emergence of a clearer trade union voice on science, if somewhat overdue, will give welcome expression to the frustrations felt by many scientific and technological workers. However, if the Alliance for Science is to make substantial political headway and avoid the fate of a well meaning but unrealistic echo of the heady expansionist days of the early 1960s it has to confront three thorny problems.

The first is the issue of military research. Currently accounting for more than half of the total resources devoted by government to science this casts its shadow over UK R&D policy as a whole. It is this factor which so sharply distinguishes Britain from two of its main industrial competitors, Germany and Japan. As a proportion of Gross Domestic Product, in all three countries total R&D expenditure (including military) is of a similar order (about 2.4%) although the rate of growth is lower in Britain. But the dominance of the military sector in Britain results in a much weaker effort in civil research whether basic or applied.

It is difficult to conceive of a plausible policy for strengthening Britain's civil research which does not involve a major reallocation of resources from the military sector. Pessimism about the political realism of this in the face of current government policy applies even more forcibly to the alternative path which would be for Britain to spend a lot more on civil research without reducing military spending and consequently a much larger proportion of GDP on science research in general than it does now. A reallocation from military to civil research would obviously have direct consequences for the members of the scientific trade unions themselves. While it is sometimes suggested that this is primarily a problem for the IPCS which organises the scientists in the government military research establishments, it is equally a problem for the industrial members of ASTMS through the extensive placing of military development contracts in the private sector. It is apparent that without a thoroughly worked out research conversion

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strategy such a policy will have difficulty sustaining the support of trade union members whose livelihood currently depends on Britain's military research effort. However it will not be resolved by ducking it as the Alliance's initial campaign declaration does.

The second problem is the complexity of the relationship between basic science and economic recovery. An over-simple model of industrial growth being triggered by the pumping of resources into scientific research was one of the rocks on which the Wilsonian modernisation strategy foundered.

A policy for science must be honest and discriminating in its support for particular research areas. Support for much fundamental work rests on legitimate cultural and intellectual grounds as well as the possibility of practical benefit. This must be openly acknowledged and not cloaked with empty promises of unspecified economic miracles. A much neglected area is 'strategic science' which addresses fundamental problems of obvious practical relevance and has a medium term payoff of perhaps ten years. Two contemporary examples would be molecular biology research relevant to biotechnology and solid-state physics research relevant to microelectronics.

The absence of a policy for strategic science is the achilles heel of British science policy. It was thrown out of the window by Lord Rothschild in his 1971 report against the protestations of Fred Dainton and the Research Councils. Ironically, in view of Rothschild's market oriented 'customer-contractor' principle, it has been the Thatcher government which has begun to rehabilitate the concept. The strengthening of the central science policy machinery of the Cabinet Office Science Secretariat, even while the CPRS 'think-tank' was dismantled round its ears is an implicit recognition that strategic science had disappeared down the gap between the Research Councils' basic research mission and the government departments' short-term applied science needs.

The contradiction for Thatcherism is that the renewal of strategic science requires coordination and planning, sometimes presented under the more acceptable guise of 'picking winnners'. A more focussed assault by the Alliance for Science on a policy for strategic science will probably reap more political rewards than the present implicit assertion that unselective support for all science will bear economic fruit.

The final problem concerns the democratic accountability of science. Public disenchantment with the negative applications of science is substantial. As Bill Brett of IPCS acknowleges: 'Science has got a bad name'. An important accompaniment to the growth of popular movements on peace, feminism and ecology has been a distrust of leaving decisions to 'the experts'. Central to any campaign for change in R&D policy must be a programme for democratic reform of the administration of science. A policy merely that scientists should be given more money to spend will fall on deaf ears as far as the public is concerned. Direct representation of workers, consumers and the public in many decisions on science and technology must be pursued.

The Alliance for Science in its calls for greater openness of decision making and for the establishment of a tripartite National R&D Economic Development Council make an important step in this direction. With a broader approach the Alliance could embrace not only other trade unions but a variety of social movements and thereby start to change the face of science and technology in Britain.

Fred Steward

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The massive public response to the famine in Ethiopia has embarrassed the Government, who are currently cutting back on aid. But the Left's performance in this area has been nothing to write home about.

FAMINE What Can the Left Give?

John Sender & Sheila Smith

THE ETHIOPIAN FAMINE, involving starvation and suffering affecting millions of people, has a variety of causes. Climatic problems have caused the drought, but although drought is a contributory factor, it cannot be regarded as the cause of the famine. The legacy of feudalism and stagnation during the Haile Selassie regime, with its archaic concentration of land ownership and a disastrous absence of sustained development in transport, industry or agriculture, health or education, has meant that Ethiopia is among the poorest countries in the world.

The current regime, the Dergue, which came to power after the 1974 revolution, inherited an extraordinarily backward economy, and has faced a variety of class and national conflicts, in particular the Eritrean independence struggle, which dates back to 1961. Although the Dergue has undertaken some progressive and popular policies, such as the Land Reform in 1975 and a mass literacy campaign, it is highly authoritarian and has placed at the forefront of its strategy the determination to maintain a united Ethiopia.

The economic and political consequences of the wars in Eritrea, the Ogaden, Tigray and Oromo have included the use of extremely scarce resources (government expenditure, foreign exchange, and labour power), for the war effort, hence diverting them from productive investment. The slow growth of wage employment, restrictions on migration, and the prevention of peasants hiring wage labour, have meant that the mass of the rural population continue to be reliant on low productivity subsistence farming, and are therefore extremely vulnerable to adverse climatic change.

The immediate problem raised by the famine is clearly the need to mobilise emergency supplies of food aid through those agencies which are capable of effectively distributing supplies to the people affected. In the longer term, investment in agriculture, transport and industry is vital to ensure that drought in the future does not generate famine on such an appalling scale. The resources needed for this investment must partly come from domestic sources – implying a resolution of the civil wars. However, the degree of poverty and the absence of developmental infrastructure is so severe, that even if far more impressive domestic efforts than in the past were to be made in the next few years, these would need to be substantially supplemented by foreign aid, in order to raise income levels and reduce within the foreseeable future the vulnerability of peoples' access to the means to reproduce themselves.

> public response has obviously embarrassed the Thatcher government

Political reaction in Britain

The Ethiopian famine has evoked massive public response. The scale and extent of this response reflects genuine humanitarian concerns about poverty and starvation which are widespread in British society. These concerns have very deep cultural roots, and find their expression in an amazing variety of organisations and institutions: schools, youth clubs, the guides and scouts, churches, Womens Institutes, evening classes, TV programmes such as Blue Peter, have all, for many years, been involved in discussions and activities which reflect an awareness of, and concern for, the appalling conditions of life of large sections of the population in developing countries.

Over the last couple of months, though, this activity and concern has acquired a quite new momentum. Symbolic of this popular mood, is the fact that in these days of relatively apolitical pop, many leading pop stars have banded together to make a record in aid of the famine victims which is this Christmas' No1 hit. More directly, organisations such as War on Want, the World Development Movement, Oxfam and other voluntary agencies have been successful in mobilising sufficient resources to direct over £100 million worth of aid into short-term relief and longer-term projects in Ethiopia.

This public response has obviously embarrassed the Thatcher government. It has raised the issues of the volume and criteria for the allocation of aid to developing countries in parliament and the media in a way that has dramatically highlighted an ideological gap between the deeply held moral convictions of large numbers of people in the UK and the petty, short-sighted brutalism of the current administration. Furthermore, this response can-

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not easily be dismissed as ephemeral. On the one hand, liberal, religious and humanitarian movements concerned with African conditions of life have occupied a rather prominent postion in British political, social and intellectual life since at least the rise of abolitionist and emancipation organisations in the mid-19th century. On the other hand, the number of those with a committed socialist perspective, who are actively engaged in organisations such as the World Development Movement and War on Want, as well as work in primary schools and adult education, has been growing rapidly for over a decade. It may be possible to account for the relatively large scale and momentum of the public outcry in 1984, (as compared to earlier responses to food crises in South Asia or Africa in the 1960s and early 1970s), in terms of the positive achievements of such activists over a period of many years.

However, much of the Left in Britain has remained organisationally aloof from such activities and concerns. Indeed, one must suspect, for example, that the Left has organised relatively few initiatives or collections on its own account for the famine. How is it possible to explain this detachment? One explanation involves analysing a set of prejudices that are quite common amongst socialists. The ideological position of many socialists to charitable activities has frequently been based on unjustified assumptions concerning the superiority of their analysis and practice: those who engage in charity are at best politically naive, at worst conscious upholders of the status quo; charity 'papers over the cracks', and is interpreted as an attempt to plug the gaps and cater to needs which ought to be met by governments; that charity substitutes for politics; and that the 'correct' response to manifest suffering should be political activity to pressurise governments to make public provision, thereby removing the rationale for the very existence of charity; that historically, charity has allowed the haves to salve their consciences, whilst leaving untouched the mechanisms which reproduce privilege and deprivation.

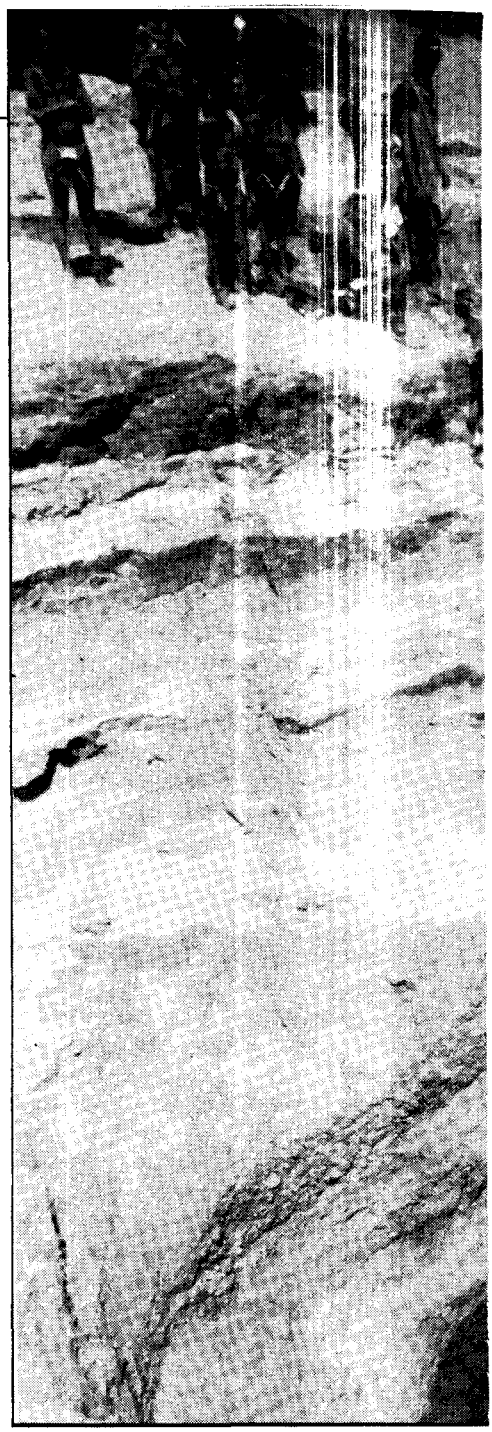
Weaknesses of the Left approach

The assumptions underlying this traditional response to charity are clearly problematic. A critique of these assumptions and of certain other views current on the Left may provide the beginnings of an explanation for the inadequacy of the political response, not only to poverty in Ethiopia, but also to the broader problem of defining the economic and political content of an appropriate relationship between the UK and the developing countries. A feature of the response to recent events in Ethiopia is that a number of socialists have failed to contribute to or learn from the bewildering variety of non-governmental organisations that have been such remarkably effective channels for the concern of progressive social and political forces in Britain. The inability of some socialists decisively to draw upon and engage with these forces has left a gap which Princess Anne, Robert Maxwell and other more or less reactionary forces and institutions have failed.

Organisations such as the World Development Movement, War on Want, Oxfam and VSO represent an actual or potential context for the practice of internationalism. None of the reservations or criticisms that socialists may have concerning the policies and programmes of these non-governmental organisations (NGOs) constitute grounds for denying their potential as mobilisers of public opinion and as agents of progressive internationalism. Indeed, these criticisms of NGOs, such as they are, may well mainly be a reflection of the absence of sufficient and decisively committed Left involvement in the organisations concerned.

The view that the state, and the state alone, is the appropriate agent for redistributive and egalitarian action to compensate for the injustices of capitalist production and distribution, within and outside the UK, is severely flawed. It is a view of politics that seriously underemphasises the contribution of non-centralised, smaller scale, participatory and democratic institutions; at the same time, such a view often condemns its protagonists to wishful thinking and day-to-day irrelevance, until such time as 'genuine' socialists hold the reins of state power.

There cannot be much impetus for popular and immediate political initiatives on development issues unless the Left jettisons two traditional notions: first, that non-state agencies such as Oxfam suffer from the same defects as any other charity, merely providing a haven for naive middle-class do-gooders, or not so naive latter-day missionaries with paternalistic pretensions; and second, that state-orchestrated aid is inextricably and ultimately hopelessly bound up with international capitalist machinations – such that the institutions which are inevitably concerned with aid like the US Agency for International Development, the British Overseas Development Administration and the World Bank are inherently retrogressive, and in which intervention is therefore pointless.



Other strands

There are other strands of thinking on the Left that have combined to justify inaction and have contributed to the inadequacy of socialist debate and political responses to the issue of poverty in Ethiopia. These strands also underly some of the defects of the debate on broader questions of UK trade and aid to developing countries. Far too frequently (and some of the literature on Ethiopia provides an excellent illustration), no explanation of poverty in developing countries is sought in terms of internal political forces, domestic policy failures, the class character of particular regimes, or the deficiencies of their econo-

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Ethiopia: finding precious water.

mic strategy. The explanations offered are often much too simple: for example, that Reagan, Thatcher, the CIA and EEC bureaucrats conspired to block aid to Ethiopia and starve 900,000 people unfortunate enough to live in an identifiably Marxist state (which is not to say that there was no obstruction or procrastination); or, similarly, that the machinations of international anti-socialist forces fully account for the disastrous agricultural and balance of payments performance in Tanzania over the last five years.

The point being made here is certainly not a denial of the horrors and brutality that in many parts of the world, most notably and recently in Central America, have stemmed directly and indirectly from US foreign policy, and from foreign military and economic subversion. Rather, the question being raised is to what extent these interventions, by themselves, can explain outcomes. In some cases, like El Salvador, these are the dominant factor, in others they are not.

An analysis that is underpinned by an excessive stress on the powerlessness of the developing countries as victims in the face of international capital leaves much too little scope for political initiatives or class struggle either within or outside the boundaries of these nations. Similarly, the practical consequences of another set of arguments, denying that any progress whatsoever may be expected in developing countries unless and until an anti-imperialist revolution has occurred, may well be political inertia. Socialists must consider at least two critical questions that have often been ignored by those who see no practical alternative to revolution:

(i) it is hard to deny that in many developing countries (*unlike* Ethiopia) the short and medium-term prospects for the overthrow of existing regimes – for revolution – are by no means favourable. In those circumstances, surely we are not to deny the possibilities of both domestic and international activity which can have favourable political and humanitarian outcomes?

(ii) there is a very real possibility that, in current conditions, a revolution may make things worse for the mass of working people in developing countries, Iran and Kampuchea being prime examples. These and other post-revolutionary disasters have occurred partly because, once the dust has settled, there is no guarantee that the socialists who have seized state power will indeed be the dominant political force; and partly because too often the Left has had an inadequate conception of a set of policies that would advance the construction of a socialist society in post-revolutionary circumstances. This is not an easy problem. The circumstances inherited by such governments are often extremely unfavourable, not only externally but also internally (eg, political, religious, national and tribal divisions). Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia are cases in point. In this light, the Sandanistas' project in Nicaragua must be seen as a remarkable achievement.

Aid, Trade and NGOs

The implications for socialist economic strategy of our analysis of the inadequacies of the response to the Ethiopian crisis and to the broader issues of relationships with developing countries are far-reaching. They cannot be drawn out in any detail here, but a number of priorities can be identified. First, there is a need to assess seriously the case for a large overall increase in the volume of overseas aid. Highlighting the defects, the real political and economic costs of tied or otherwise inappropriate forms of aid, should not continue to obscure the fundamental requirement for vastly expanded concessional capital inflows. Such flows are vital not only for Ethiopia, but also for sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. This region was unable to tap the pool of Eurodollar or Syndicated Bank Loans that grew so rapidly when the OPEC economies proved unable to absorb the surpluses resulting from rising oil prices in the 1970s.

Sub-Saharan Africa has become increasingly reliant on *official* capital inflows to finance its balance of payments deficits, since it has not been in a position to persuade international private capital that it should be permitted to accumulate the levels of debt that were achieved by the more fortunate newly industrialising countries like Brazil, Mexico and the Philippines. One consequence, given the inadequacy of official flows, has been that a large number of sub-Saharan economies have been forced for almost a decade to reduce drastically the rate of growth of essential imports and have, therefore, experienced declining or negative rates of growth of production. Moreover, the productive base and in particular the means to produce exports to meet the current and

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future imported input requirements (that are a *sine qua non* of any accumulation process) has shrunk, and will continue to erode in the absence of import-finance on a scale that is unlikely to be met by any one of the bilateral donors, be it Britain, the US or Sweden. It follows that the Left should now be calling for support for the International Development Agency (the soft loan affiliate of the World Bank that is under severe threat from the Reagan administration), support for an expansion of *selected* (as opposed to all) World Bank and IMF programmes, both those of a longer-term nature and those which are quickly and relatively automatically distributed, support for EEC-based aid (through the European Development Fund, STABEX, etc), as well as an increase in the bilateral aid programme.

Secondly, there is considerable scope for the construction of alliances with political organisations in those European countries which have pursued progressive trade and aid policies at various times, such as the Scandinavian group and the Netherlands. Such alliances might serve to counter the most reactionary aspects of the American Republican Party's policy toward international organisations, to demand adequate replenishment for the International Development Agency, and to argue for a less absurdly short-run definition of IMF objectives in terms of annual balance of payments criteria. Within the EEC, neither the Labour Party nor the many British organisations concerned with developing countries have so far been able to publicise effectively the issues central to the Lome Conventions. The politics of the Common Agricultural Policy have been dominated by Thatcher's posturing; but it is important to stress that the implications of the CAP for developing countries are extremely far-reaching. The issue of, for instance, cane sugar imports versus protected European beet production, which has such profound consequences for a particularly oppressed segment of the working class in so many poor countries, is an obvious candidate for a Europe-wide socialist debate, in which the British Left should play an important role.

> continued inactivity disguised by irrelevant sloganeering

Finally, it is very important to recognise the potentially crucial role of NGOs. In particular, there is a need for conscious concentration of support by the Left on specific NGOs, such as War on Want and World Development. But there is another dimension to this. A number of local authorities controlled by the Left have recently promoted programmes and initiatives in support of peace, feminist, and anti-racist movements. There is certainly scope for widening, and perhaps combining these intiatives with days of action and support for selected local groups that are concerned with the issues of aid and trade affecting poor Asian and African economies. It is even possible that the long established practice of 'twinning' could be revived on a large scale and applied to particularly impoverished areas of developing country cities.

NGOs provide the sole alternative to state-to-state flows of aid; in the context of the many valid criticisms of the nature and role of the state in both donor and recipient countries, NGOs constitute an obvious institutional framework for both humanitarian and socialist initiatives. If these opportunities are dismissed as either ineffective conscience-salving, or props to the status quo, the result will be continued inactivity disguised by irrelevant sloganeering. □

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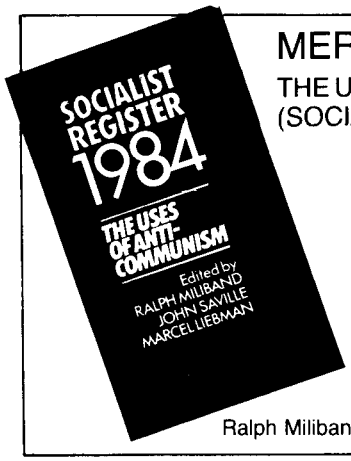

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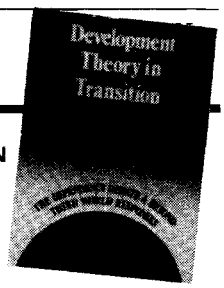

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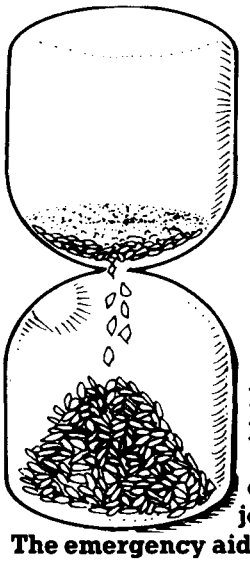

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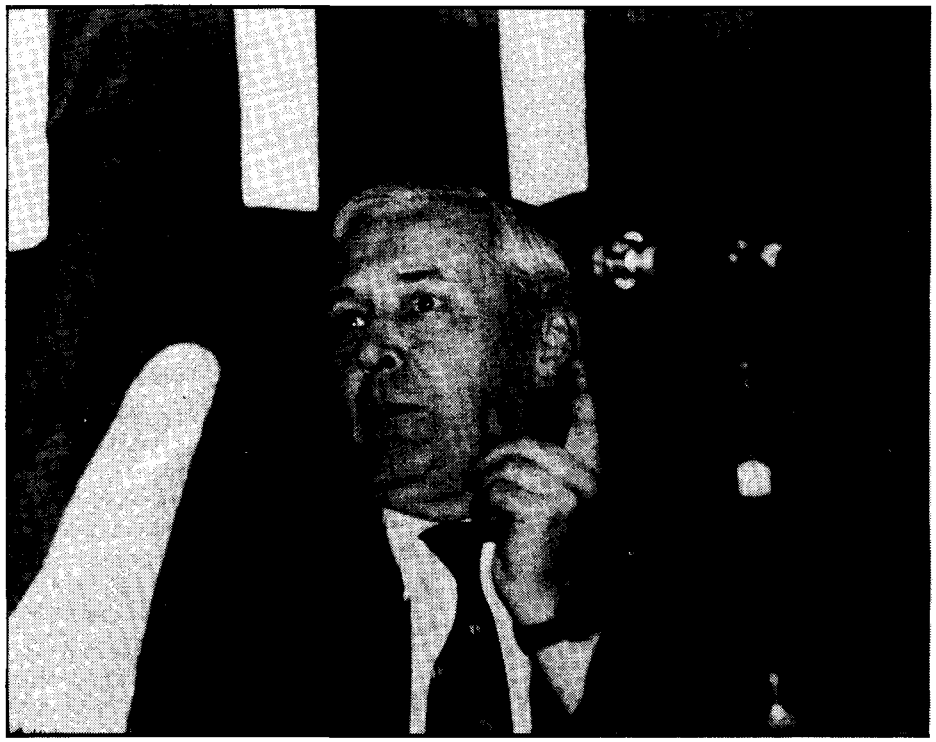
The Left is facing a serious crisis. We must put aside our differences and look to our strengths in facing future struggles.

Who Dares Wins

Tony Benn



I WOULD LIKE to begin by thanking *Marxism Today* for opening up to people like me, who are not members of the Communist Party, the opportunity of joining in this discussion about what is happening, how we should look ahead and how we should plan. I would also like to be quite clear and plain that we are entering a new and critical era in British politics, a very harsh period of struggle to defend basic rights at a time when our economic and political system is, to a very large extent, in a process of disintegration and at a time when the realignment of the Left, far from being over, has only just begun.

I joined the Labour Party 42 years ago, I was elected to parliament 34 years ago, I was elected to the National Executive of the Labour Party 25 years ago, I have served as a Cabinet Minister for 11 years in five governments and I'll be 60 in six months' time and my conclusion is very simple: that what Britain needs now is a comprehensive, peaceful and democratic revolution. We need a fundamental change in our economic system, in our power structure, in our institutions, in our ideas, in our values, including changes of equal importance in the labour and trade union movement and a recovery in our morale and self confidence. The time has come when we should argue our case in our terms and not try to defend our case against arguments that are put in their terms. That, it seems to me, must be our starting point.

I also believe that unless we offer the prospect of a real change to the British people they will not support us, follow us, or elect us; and that unless, once elected, we begin to make fundamental changes we shall be swept out of office very rapidly. There will not be time allowed to us to go round the Wilson and Callaghan course in the leisurely way that we did from 1964-1970 or again from 1974-1979. And, unless we start preparing now, as Labour local authorities and the miners are doing in their own struggles, we shan't know what to do when we get there and we shan't make any advances until we get there. There is a danger that we could always be talking about what will happen after the next election instead of discussing what we should do now. Politics is about what *we* do *here* and *now* and not what *they* do *there* and *then* when somehow they've got into parliament.

In saying this I hope you will acquit me of any complacency about the present situation or the magnitude of our defeat. Some people came up to me after the 1983 election and said 'Tony, you don't seem to realise how badly we were beaten'. Well as I lost my own seat after 33 years in the Commons, I didn't really need to be reminded of the extent of our defeat in 1983. Indeed, my conviction is that the origins of our defeat go back far further than 1979, probably to 1951 when Labour began to evacuate ideological and moral territory that had been won for socialism in earlier years and that the electoral defeats in 1979 and 1983 only represented the opportunity for the troops of the other side to move across the frontier into territory that we had already, long ago, abandoned to them. Therefore, far from thinking the situation is easier as some might argue, I believe it's a much more formidable and deep-seated crisis than many people yet realise.

The self-deception of Thatcherism

The greatest self deception to be found inside the labour movement is practised by those who pretend that the problem is one that can be described in terms of Thatcher and Thatcherism and that to replace her and substitute an anti-Thatcherite government would itself be an adequate response to what we face. If Thatcher was, in truth, the real problem the Brighton bombers might have solved it for us, yet all of us know that had she been the victim of an assassin as Mrs Ghandi was, all our investment in building up Thatcher and Thatcherism would have been wasted. We would have had Tebbit and Tebbitism or Pym and Pymism and we would have squandered our effort by trying to focus our criticism against an individual. Moreover,

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if we believe that an 'anti-Thatcherite government' would be the answer, we must remember that there are plenty of people queuing up to form such a government, including Frances Pym, David Owen, David Steel and Frank Field with his rainbow coalition which is supposed to open up a new era. There is no answer to this crisis by seeking electoral arrangements. The only electoral change that would be relevant, and I've long believed we should look at it again, is the Chartist demand for an annual parliament because if people had the vote more often that would offer a better way of controlling those who are in power.

I believe therefore that all this talk of Thatcher and Thatcherism is a diversion and that, as socialists, we must be more analytical than that. For what is really happening is much more deep-seated. A decaying British capitalism is being forced by its own internal pressures, or contradictions, to withdraw the gains that it could afford to concede to working people during the post-war boom. The present attack upon the trade unions, upon our public services, upon local democracy, upon civil liberties, upon women, upon the black community, upon the gay community and upon the Irish is a part of that process. And we have got to see this in real terms and recognise that the old liberal, middle class, I suppose best represented by the *Guardian*, which went along with the Attlee consensus is now deeply frightened. It doesn't like the present cabinet but it fears change even more, and the power base of that once great liberal establishment – if ever it was either great or liberal – is in the civil service and the mass media which now exercise enormous power over the minds of our own people.

Next, we must understand that the EEC, which was designed to give capitalism a fresh lease of life in a wider Europe, now has as its main purpose to protect business and finance from any threat to their free market operations that might emerge through the agency of progressive governments, democratically elected through the ballot box, by the states which compose the Common Market. My own experience of the EEC, on whose council of ministers I served for five years, and of which I was once President, was that if ever you tried to use your power as an elected government in any way to interfere with market forces you had one, two or three commissioners round your neck threatening to take you to court.

We must also surely see that NATO has developed into an international military axis under American hegemony to protect western economic and political influence in the Third World and to be a cover to build up huge, unaccountable, military machines inside each country, which – if the truth were known – are more anxious and concerned at the prospect of domestic unrest than they are at any prospect of foreign invasion.

Finally, we cannot avoid admitting that we have a long-running war in Ireland where the real motive is not to protect the Protestant minority, but to maintain a NATO presence on that island. Because since the Republic is a neutral country any reunification of Ireland under the Irish constitution would mean that Ireland was no longer a member of NATO. The second reason why Britain remains in the north is that it is a convenient place to prepare for domestic repression in Britain with the plastic bullets and all the measures that have been adopted there.

> ask yourself whether having Jo Gormley in the House of Lords is more powerful than having Arthur Scargill on the picket line

Abuse of institutions

Those are some of the real problems we face and we are handicapped by having inherited institutions that have become so corrupted that some of them are now barely usable as instruments by a labour movement that wants to make real change. I start with the widespread abuse of the crown prerogative by ministers. One example is the secret building of the atom bomb by Attlee who told neither cabinet nor parliament; another, the signature of the Treaty of Accession to the Common Market when it hadn't even been published under the royal prerogative of treaty making. The launching of the Falklands war was done without seeking a vote in parliament on the grounds that war-making was a royal prerogative. The abolition of the trade unions at Cheltenham was upheld by the courts on the grounds that if the crown says that questions of national security are at stake then no human rights are left that can be tested in the courts. Another aspect of the abuse of crown powers is the widely corrupting use of patronage under which a prime minister appoints and sacks ministers, appoints peers, makes judges, makes bishops, appoints the chairman of the BBC, the chairman of the IBA, the chairman of the nationalised industries. That is a power no American president has and no medieval monarch in Britain exercised.

Secondly, we have the problem of the Lords which we somehow accept as inevitable, meaning that we are only allowed to elect half a parliament and that when there is a Labour landslide we control one house out of two and when there is a Tory landslide they control both houses. There is, too, a wider danger to democracy that comes from a tendency for parliamentary democracy which the Chartists and the Suffragettes fought to establish, to decline into a weak type of 'elected parliamentarianism' where members of parliament seem to be content to be excluded from real power by the executive working behind official secrecy that leaves Labour backbenchers out of any knowledge of what is happening even when we are in power; and by an intense dislike of accountability which has expressed itself in recent debates within the Labour Party.

Next, we have a misuse of the police and the security services, the unaccountable power of the mandarins, the media, the pollsters, the magistrates and the judges who have become, and allowed themselves to become, naked instruments of class power as has emerged so clearly during the miners' strike. And, if I am listing what is wrong, we have a defective educational system designed, through O-levels and A-levels, to set up hurdles that keep working-class people down and pave the way for a managerial elite reinforced by a few bright working-class kids to go on into top positions, and ultimately to retire at 60 on half pay, index-linked, when others have to struggle on to 65, if they are lucky enough not to be made redundant before that time comes. We also have an economic system that excludes any democratic control whatever from those who work in private industry. Then there is institutionalised sexism and racism throughout society and an artificially induced nationalism built upon a fear and distrust that is deliberately stimulated to inhibit – for political purposes – any action that might correct it.

If I have learned one lesson from a lifetime in politics, and a lot of it in what you would call the top of politics, it is that

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we cannot use the institutions and cultures devised by another class, in another period, for another purpose, to meet our needs in our age for our purposes and we have got to be more fundamental in our approach. Just ask yourself whether having Joe Gormley in the House of Lords is more powerful than having Arthur Scargill on the picket line, and see which institutions best assist us in our purpose. We must create much more democratic and open institutions and our own culture if we are to win.

This whole superstructure was designed and is operated to control us, to divide us, to confuse us and to demoralise us and hence to preserve the status quo by pretending that there is no alternative. One of the greatest failures of the British labour movement, which is one of the strongest and best in the world, is that throughout its history and even in its periods of parliamentary power, it has done practically nothing whatsoever to change power relationships in the state. Thus the argument about revolution versus reform is almost irrelevant in that we haven't even had reform in Britain. We have had people talking about reform but not reforming and hence a fundamental change is now called for.

A clear stand

Our task, it seems to me, is to liberate people, to unite people, to clarify the issues, to encourage people, to prepare and to organise for the change we know is necessary. If we look at the practical steps that this requires we must begin with the real situation that actually faces us. We must support the miners in their struggle, in terms of cash, in terms of organisation, and in terms of political argument. We must also protect other unions in struggle, support actively the women's demands which have not been met, to support the ethnic communities, to support the pensioners, many of whom will die this winter of hypothermia for lack of coal the miners could dig if they were not just about to be sacked. We must fight for the young unemployed who leave school in Liverpool and six years later have no prospect of work. We must support the peace movement and the Irish in their demand for reunification. And we have to connect these struggles, one with another, because one of the cleverest things the establishment does is to keep us in watertight compartments, and some trade union leaders have gone along with it for years by saying 'we're in an industrial struggle, it's not political'. You've only got to say a strike is 'political' and everybody holds up their hands. You've got to connect all struggles and unite all struggles and we've got to encourage a socialist dialogue. We now have a lot of historical experience of socialism, not only in the Soviet Union and the Eastern countries but in Yugoslavia, in Cuba, in Nicaragua, and there is a lot of political argument going on amongst socialists. Perhaps you'll allow me to say that it is time we buried the old family quarrel between Stalin and Trotsky and listened to what is said by all types of socialists in the debate. If you don't agree with them, out-argue them – but don't exile them and expel them and hope that in that way you can avoid difficult questions.

The labour movement has now got to formulate clear demands. We must use the energy released by the miners' strike which is phenomenal in those areas, with the women's action groups and so on.

we have forgotten the power of moral argument

We've got a whole range of hitherto unknown capacities and have had a tremendous morale boost. Now we've got to use all that talent and put it behind clear demands upon the system – all of which are well within our capacity as a rich industrial country. We must demand useful work, and that will probably mean a huge expansion of the public services. We must demand lifelong education for all so you can go in and out of school and college as now you go in and out of a library to learn what you want to learn, when you want to learn it, and come out when you've learned it without all these absurd barriers set up by the colleges. We must have a comprehensive health service so that you don't need to wait until you are ill before you go to the doctor. You should go on a regular basis for a check-up and health care must be extended into legal barriers against pollution which causes so much ill health, or the use of chemicals in food that is a danger.

And, if Mrs Thatcher doesn't nationalise the banks within the next few months, which is quite possible, if the Third World debt crisis causes a financial collapse – as Mussolini did in the 1920s – if she doesn't do it, we've got to do it. We have also got to go for non-alignment and break with the NATO arrangement for the reasons that I gave earlier on. We've got to go for a planned economy that allows to this country, in conjunction with other countries, freedom from the Treaty of Rome. And we've got to move to a united Ireland by terminating our jurisdiction in Ireland and then help bring together our comrades and colleagues from across the water, towards class politics in Ireland.

Class structure and political support

The final question is 'can we win support for these ideas?' Has some subtle and irreversible shift in the class structure taken place that has deprived us of our historic opportunity? Is it true that all we're left to do is to have a private talk with somebody from another party to see if we could cook up an alternative to the present cabinet? Is it really true that because there are fewer blue collar workers we can't do any of these things? That because computer operators have bought their council houses and got a new brass knocker and are upwardly mobile, we can't do any of these things? Is it true that because the TUC, which was never strong at its strongest, have adopted the 'new realism' we shall never be able to do these things?

I don't believe it. First of all because when we did have a classic class structure of a kind that would have made every Marxist go to sleep happily at night, we always had a Tory government. We never had socialism in the 19th century when there was great oppression, enormous poverty, or in the 30s when millions of people were organised in unions in their overalls, we never had socialism. We cannot build our future on the idea that we must rely upon mechanistic Labourist loyalties not based on any serious thought. And may I put another point to you: industrialisation is very new in Britain, it's only been going for 200 years. We were a Third World country until the middle of the 18th century, and in the Third World socialism has made far greater advances than it has in many industrialised countries. I think Marx himself would have been amazed to discover that it wasn't Germany that was the first country to go socialist followed by Britain, it's the Third World countries that have gone socialist. Countries that have never even had the industrial class structure whose departure has caused such anxiety to so many socialist intellectuals. And let me say something else. We have forgotten the power of moral argument: the idea that some things are right and some things are wrong. The real strengths of socialism lie in the non-economic values that we advocate, the rejection of economics even if we can manipulate them in our favour. Even if we could produce theories or figures that

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show that every pit was profitable, that's not what it's about at all. Look, for example, at Latin America where the liberation theologians have begun to join with the Marxists so that priests are Marxists and Marxists are priests, and you can get an idea of its strength. Nor should we forget that common sense is on our side.

Popular support, not electoral deals

I believe that the road to victory lies in accepting one or two ideas before we start. Firstly, we should understand the enormous dangers that face us, including the drift to fascism without being a little bit frightened of any of them. But we must understand that they are there. Secondly, we must have the courage to speak up and fight because all the experiences of 1984 have shown that if you fight you win, and if you fudge you fail. That has been proved by the miners, by the Liverpool councillors who were also denounced and, dare I say it, by the thousands of people from the Labour Party and the Communist Party who came into Chesterfield. There we put forward a principled socialist position and beat the media that spent a million pounds and sent 25 film units and endless pollsters and all the Fleet Street hacks into that town. The fact that we beat them, is an indication there is nothing to be afraid of if you say what you mean and mean what you say, and people believe it.

Our road to victory does not lie in coaxing back half a dozen *Guardian* readers from their flirtation with the SDP, but in mobilising the 10 million people who don't vote but who are our natural constituents because they are the ones, more than any other, who are repressed by our society. I do not believe that we will win by disconnected theorising, or electoral manoeuvring. We shall win by practical socialist arguments that begin with the experience of ordinary men and women. We must be there when they need us, and then assist them, as best we can, to learn from their experience and make something of it so that socialism and the vision that we have, and the revolution that we need, is constructed by the people, for the people, and not one that drips down from above – to be imposed whether they like it or not.

I am an optimist. I confess it is a terrifying period if you look at it one way. But if you look at it in another way there is more buoyancy, more hope, more activity and more confidence now than I've known at any time in my political life and I was born in 1925. Whatever we say, and whatever arguments we have, and however we disagree we must do nothing that would discourage that hope from realising itself in action. Socialists must provide that unifying thread that connects all these struggles together. Then there is really nothing we cannot achieve and we can resuscitate that old long-forgotten slogan 'Socialism in our time'. □

The balance of forces doesn't look promising for the Left. In spite of everything the Right continues to hold the political initiative, while the Left has barely begun the vital work of renewing and transforming its project.

Faith, Hope or Clarity

Stuart Hall

LET ME START by saying that I regard this not as a debate in which one tries to score easy points – the issues at stake are too important for that – but as a serious discussion about the current prospects for socialism and the Left. I have long admired Tony Benn for some of the courageous positions he has taken in the labour movement. Nevertheless, I differ substantially from the main thrust of what he has just said in one respect in particular, which however is of fundamental importance.

I do not differ substantially from the characterisation of the state of the country under the Thatcher government which he has offered. Nor do I find myself in disagreement about the broad direction of change which he argues is historically now required in this society. But the argument is not about these questions. The argument between us resolves itself principally into a *strategic* question which, may I add, *Marxism Today* has played the key role in placing on the political agenda. The question is: what is the balance of forces in Britain at this present moment? How are the forces for and against the Left disposed? When one looks at the political situation, can one say that the balance of political forces is such as to suggest that the immediate prospects for socialism look favourable? Do the broad political forces which are necessary for any decisive turn to the left in Britain look stronger, better organised, on the offensive on a broad range of fronts and more in commond of the initiative than they did two or five years ago? Does the Left look like the kind of alliance capable of putting socialism as a political project back on the agenda – and doing so in a way which is capable of winning mass majority popular support in the country? I do not believe that any serious analyst of politics can answer these strategic questions in the affirmative. And *that* is the issue on which I substantially differ from Tony Benn.

An assessment of the current balance of forces resolves itself into basically two aspects. The first has to do with the character and relative strength of the Right; the second has to do with the strength, unity and prospects for the Left. Everything that I want to say can really be largely resumed under those two headings.

But let me first, as an aside, respond to Tony Benn's charge of 'pessimism'. It will undoubtedly emerge, as I go on, that I am

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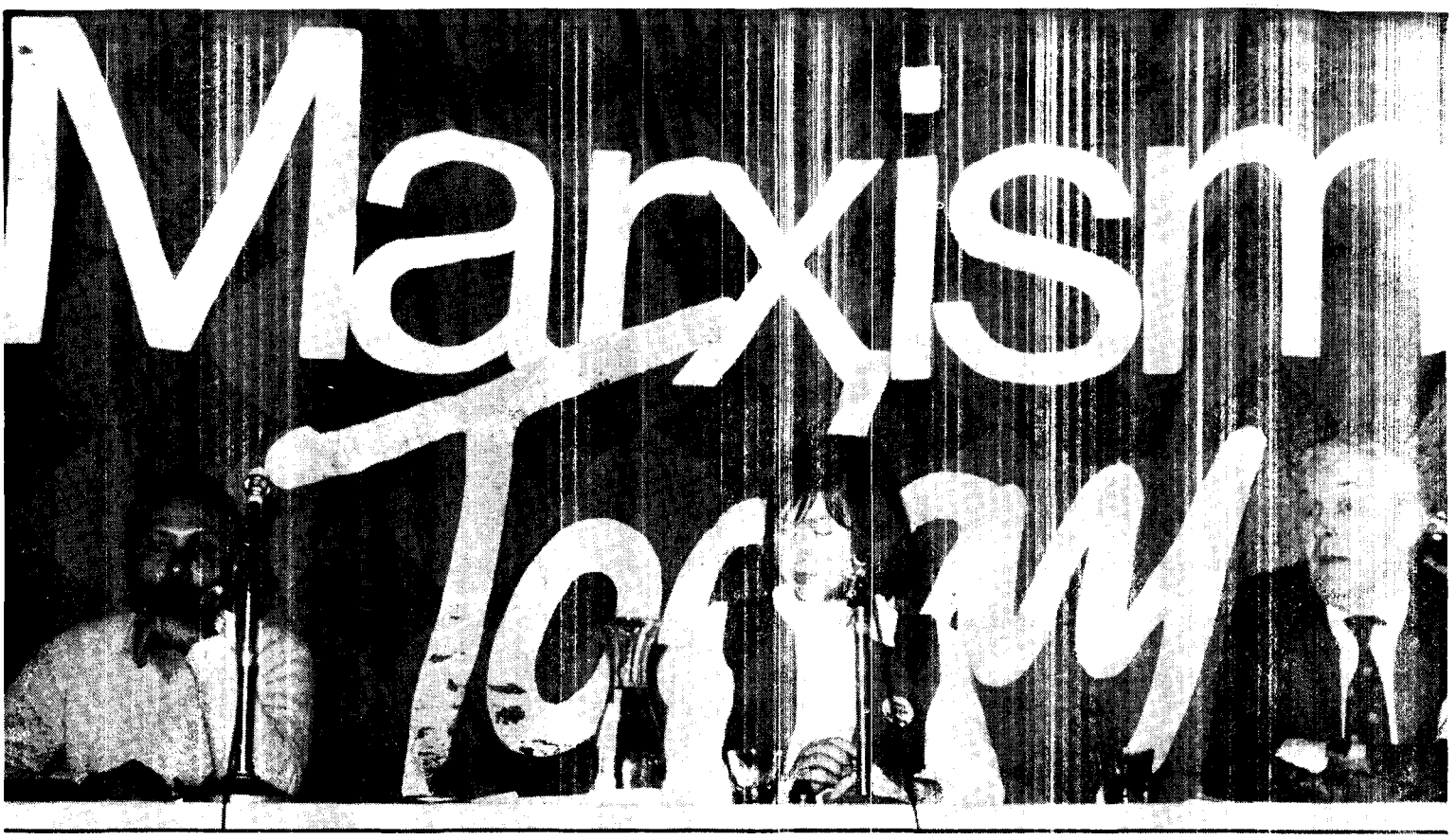

Stuart Hall and Tony Benn at the Left Face conference, [illegible]

quite pessimistic about the current political climate. I am sorry about that. I don't enjoy it. Pessimism is not my natural temperament or state of mind. In fact, in my view the question of pessimism is neither here nor there. The issue is not whether I am pessimistic or not, but whether I am correct in my analysis of the current situation. I am not here to engage in a trade off with anyone as to which of us can best rally the troops. Rallying the troops has its place in politics, but this is not such an occasion. The question is, rather, being realistic about what there is for the troops to be optimistic about. And this thought, awkward as it is, leads me to speak, briefly, of another: the responsibilities of intellectuals.

Ours remains a deeply anti-intellectual movement. Of course, intellectuals have much to atone for in the labour movement: their lack of involvement in the struggle, their lack of centrality in active politics, often, their divorce from the experiences and aspirations of ordinary working people. Nevertheless, in addition to duties, intellectuals also have responsibilities to the movement. And their prime responsibility is to analyse in depth the situation which confronts us so that our analysis may inform political action and strategy, and prepare people to be better armed intellectually, theoretically, politically, in the struggle that lies ahead. Intellectuals can only discharge that duty if they are prepared to speak of the situation as honestly and ruthlessly as they find it. 'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will': that was Gramsci's watchword and I do not hesitate to say that it will do for me too.

The concept of Thatcherism

Now we can briefly start with the Right. I have used the term Thatcherism and I insist on it. It is ludicrous to suggest that by doing so, one over-personalises the Right. Just as Stalinism is not attributable to Stalin alone, so Thatcherism, as a political formation, is not limited to the person of the prime minister. One uses it in order to insist on the specific and distinct character of the new Right as a political formation. The description of this session in the programme for the weekend spoke about the major blow to the labour movement and the Left represented by the 1983 general election. Of course. It was a massive, major defeat inflicted on the whole of the Left by this new political formation. The only question is, why was it unexpected? The trend has been perfectly clear for all optimists to see since 1979. Anybody who really understands British politics, and who is not bemused by the idiotic psephology which passes for political analysis these days, knows that 1979 was not simply an electoral reverse, it was a profound and damaging political reversal. As is always the case in British politics, the electoral landslide of 1983 was not the cause but the result, the symptom, of a much deeper political reversal which began, not with Mrs Thatcher's overwhelming majority in 1983, but with the ultimate collapse and disintegration of the Callaghan government in the mid-70s and the haemorrhaging of popular support to the Right which followed.

Why, then, insist on the distinctive character of Thatcherism? The first reason is that, of course, although Thatcherism as a political and ideological force owes a great deal to traditions which have been active in the ruling class, on the Right and in the Conservative Party for a very long period of time, we have not seen that kind of political engagement, right across the political spectrum, by a political force on the Right at any time since the war. Secondly, as a political force, the new Right combines new and old elements. It draws on the old lexicon of organic, patriotic Toryism, but it combines this with a virulent brand of neo-liberal economics and an aggressive religion of the market. It is this novel combination which has established a kind of popular bridgehead in the community at large. Of course, there have been popular Conservative governments before – right through the 19th and 20th centuries. But what is particularly novel is that the new Right succeeded in its effort to establish *itself* as the radical political force, the political force that was going to change things. One of the most astonishing signs of the reversal in the 1979 election was to hear Mr Callaghan complain that the radical Right meant to tear the old

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system up by the roots. And we had been foolish enough to imagine that tearing society up by the roots was what *socialism* was about!

The harsh, uncomfortable fact is that the Right was able sufficiently to identify itself as a kind of populist political force, able to connect its message with some of the actual, real discontents which people were experiencing under Labour. Further, the evidence is clear that, however temporarily, the new Right made an effective penetration into the very heartland of the traditional support for the Left and the labour movement. It displaced reformist politics from the centre of the political stage and began to swing people: to provide people with the terms, not necessarily with the profound conviction, but with plausible reason enough to win to its side important sectors of the community. The new Right *was* able to disorganise the Left, to deepen the unpopularity of the unions and anti-union sentiment, to attack directly those elements of the postwar consensus which, though of course they did not constitute socialism, must inevitably constitute the basis and groundwork in Britain for the socialist case. If you cannot, in a country like ours, with its deep divisions of class and its massive inequalities, sustain intact the popular case for welfare socialism, what is the evidence that the transition to socialism proper is at hand?

A political defeat

And now, in spite of massive unemployment, the extensive deindustrialisation of the British economy, despite the fact that the Right now propagates an explicitly class view of society, where it is planned to off-load the costs of the recession on to the backs of the working class, the Left still cannot generate the broad, sweeping, emergent movement of opposition and resistance; the electorate do not regard Labour as a credible political alternative. In my view, despite its many disasters and the mobilisation around the miners' strike, the Right is *still* in place as the leading political force in society. Certainly, Thatcherism is not universally popular. It cannot resolve the basic problems of the society and the economy. Thatcherism has never commanded universal assent on the political scene. But that is not what political leadership is about. It's impossible in a society like ours. The question is: can it lead the key sectors? Can it win the strategic engagements? Can it stay in front when challenged? The awkward fact is that so far the Left cannot prevent the massive privatisation going on in industry, has succeeded, where the defence of the welfare state is concerned, with staving off massive cuts only in the National Health Service, cannot prevent the dismantling of the GLC and the metropolitan boroughs, has not so far reversed the widespread unpopularity of the unions, and has no way of guaranteeing the kind of success for the miners which was achieved in 1972 and 1974.

Now I think what I have been describing is a political defeat, a political throwback, a reversal of a very profound kind. I have no investment in the term Thatcherism itself, but I think it undermines our understanding of how profound the political reversal is simply to say there is nothing new, the new Right is just the old class enemy in a new disguise. If you say it's just the old enemy, apart from misreading its particular political complexion, you might be tempted to believe that the Left can fight it in just the old ways. Its political programme and ideas are represented as simply 'their' ideology, nothing whatsoever to do with us: the Left can go on its sweet way, addressing its own supporters in its own, old tried ways. I have to say that I think that way of understanding how political ideas find root in the actual experience of people is absolutely incorrect.

> Just as Stalinism is not attributable to Stalin alone, so Thatcherism. . . is not limited to the person of the prime minister

It represents a kind of automotism on the Left. The ruling class has *its* ideas, and the working class has the expected revolutionary consciousness: all you have to do is to present the latter with the correct slogans and policies. Or, their fathers and grandfathers voted Labour and they are going to go on doing so till the end of time. Or, because people have a particular socio-economic position somehow they are going to have the correct thoughts at the correct moment. Again and again, the Left has operated with an analysis which leads it to expect the working class to turn up in an already united form, in its appropriate place in the frame, so to speak. And when it fails to do so, instead of going back and trying ruthlessly to examine why it is, why under particular historical circumstances things have not worked out in the predicted way, we have comforted ourselves with predictions about the ever rising tempo of class struggle, or fallen back on conspiracy theories – all would be well if the movement were not misled by what Tariq Ali charmingly called the 'pink professors'. There is no need to engage in struggle for that difficult terrain where 'hearts and minds' are won and lost. The band of the faithful will do it. Now I am in favour of faith, especially when it moves mountains. But, not being religious, I am dubious about faith without some other visible means of support. On its own, faith has never created socialism.

Why is it that the Right has been able to exercise political authority in this way? In part it has to do with the relationship between the different political forces and the whole society. One disastrous aspect of the Left's response to the 1979 and 1983 elections is the idea that the Left can, as it were, mount a resistance when it is required and generate the kind of popular solidarity and support which is needed to halt the Right's advance, by rallying the already converted, from within itself alone. This is the view that Tony Benn came close to justifying, that by organising and consolidating its own already committed ranks, by strengthening and deepening those forces which are already mobilised, that that will be sufficient to win the struggle.

Class – reality not rhetoric

Now my own view is that, although organising around existing left forces and the organised labour movement is an absolute prerequisite of an effective fightback, it is not enough to displace the new Right. The Left must also be able, on its own programme, with its own project, to engage the society as a whole, to become representative of society as a whole, to generalise itself throughout society, to bring over strategic popular majorities on the key issues, to win converts, first of all among those sectors of its own class and those who can come into alliance with it, but who have in recent years not supported it. But secondly, to make converts to its cause, to carry the case to a widening set of constituencies, to polarise the society in new ways towards the left, to connect with new experiences in society, to engage with its increasing complexity and in that way to make socialism grow in relevance to the emerging experiences as well as the tradi-

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tional experiences of our time.

There may be historical scenarios when socialism can and has to be built without becoming the politics of the popular majorities of society, but the precedents for it are not good, and in any case Britain is not at the moment a place where such a scenario has the slightest credibility. But that means coming out of our own, self-imposed ghetto, whether that ghetto is the labour movement, or the trade union movement, or the Labour Party: coming out and engaging with society as a whole. It doesn't only mean engaging with the new sectors, new issues and new movements on the Left. It also means engaging with the many positions and aspects of class experience which are not currently touched by or reflected in the ways in which socialism is defined. Let us not allow ourselves here to be confused by rhetorical appeals on this question of class. I am afraid I think Tony Benn grossly misrepresented the question of class by caricaturing our argument as if we had advanced some notion that class is disappearing or the class system has been abolished, and with it the basis of the socialist case. No one could seriously sustain such a case.

What is being debated, and *has* to be, is what the real composition of the working class in advanced industrial capitalist societies is today. Do its experiences, aspirations and agendas remain what they have always been, untouched by time and history? A sentimentalised version of class of that kind does exist, but it is a strange historical construct and has precious little to do with Marxist analysis or socialist politics. What we are talking about are the real changes which are going on in the working class: not just political changes, but changes in the way in which the class is constituted, how classes themselves and their relationships are always made and remade in a crisis. If we know anything from our historical past, it is that crises are periods of *re*construction as well as deconstruction. Changes move and accelerate more rapidly when the normal defences are weakened and the normal operations of society are suspended, in a crisis.

What one is saying is: look at the social, economic, cultural forces which are constantly remaking and revolutionising the society, including its class dynamic. Look at how class constantly reworks other issues and contradictions in society. Unless the Left can develop political programmes which are adequate to this shifting reality, which adequately reflect the actual variety of social experiences, it is perfectly possible for the Left to lose its purchase on the political imagination of the masses and for the Right to develop forms of address, language and appeal which, while lacking the capacity really to transform their existence, nevertheless present people with plausible ways of making sense of their experience; ways which bend them towards political support for the Right or which, at the very least, undermine and disorganise their previous commitments to the labour movement and the Left.

The state of the Left

Now I don't think that we can frame an adequate project or strategy for the revival of socialism and the Left unless and until we have come to terms with the dimension of the problem: that is to say, with the novelty of the new Right and its capacity to develop, between 1975 and 1984, a form of hegemonic politics, that is to say, a form of politics which, while not universally popular, was able to fight and establish its position on one front after another. The new Right was able to generate a notion of what the whole society was or should be about; it gave people a picture of what 'a whole way of life' was about. The fact that we find that picture degrading does not undermine the fact that Thatcherism presented people with a philosophy of life, of what the whole society was like. By contrast, who can say with confidence what a socialist Britain would be like to live in?

This brings us to the other side of the equation – the Left. It seems clear that the Right used the negative experience of social democracy in the 60s and 70s to establish their own case. A counter philosophy or image of the society of that kind does not at present exist on the Left and all of Tony Benn's heroic efforts to conjure one out of the past, important though that recovery of socialist tradition is, cannot replace the need for a picture of socialism in the 21st century.

How do we assess the current strength and unity of the forces of the Left? Undoubtedly the miners' strike has released enormous confidence and energy on the Left. But our political futures are unlikely to be decided by any single engagement, however strategic. Let us look across the board at how the Left has faced up to the undermining of some of its basic positions and support since Labour gave up all semblance of reformism in the mid-70s and itself opened up the pathway into monetarism and 'economic realism'.

The growth of the Left in constituency Labour Parties is obviously of crucial importance here: such a change in political tempo inside the party itself obviously has important consequences in terms of preparing socialist positions, and so on. But it is clear from the last two elections that the socialist response to the new Right cannot be built from inside the Labour Party alone. Secondly, what is happening is more a capturing of positions and initiatives inside the party by the resolute Left. It does not – with some important excep-

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tions – involve a real popular surge of socialist feeling inside the Labour Party of a kind which looks capable of convincing the population as a whole that Labour is a credible political alternative to the Right.

I think there are two problems here. One has to do with the nature of the Labour Party itself, and the Left's conception of the party's relationship to society. The Left seems to think somehow that if it is able to change the tempo, the commitment, the vitality of political work, inside the constituency parties, it will thereby inevitably change society. It's a curious way which people in the Labour Party have of identifying the party with the world. The fact is, of course, that the political fightback against the new Right has happened as effectively outside of the traditional echelons and organisation of the Labour Party as it has inside. And unless one looks at the broad and varied fronts of struggle which have brought numbers of people into activity, one wouldn't be giving an adequate account of it. But then, one has to ask, what is the relationship of the Labour Party to all those different forces that are in struggle and actually compose 'the Left' on the ground? The traditional view is that although the Labour Party welcomes single-issue campaigns, on the whole it continues to act as if, in the end, *it* will be capable of incorporating and subordinating all those other struggles and of doing so without fundamentally transforming its own internal structure, political character and project. Even though Tony Benn always scrupulously acknowledges the role of the new social movements, I detect precisely this absorbative approach in his project too. I personally don't believe it's possible.

I think the only way in which Labour, or any other political party on the Left for that matter, should function is by recognising the fundamentally diverse character of this thing which is called 'the Left'. It is impossible to foresee a point when all those struggles and movements come into line inside the already established hierarchy of social forces that constitute the existing labour movement, settle their differences and resolve in the great scheme of things to take their appointed place in the line and wait in turn, women behind men, blacks behind women, gays behind everybody. Waiting their turn. As a political project that seems to be absolutely dead: and yet I see little evidence that the Labour Party in general is able to construct any new kind of relationship with those new social forces which are at once also, in the main, part of the working class. The one thing I am sure of is that the problem cannot be resolved without the construction of a major set of alliances around the labour movement and that in turn cannot develop without transforming the nature of socialist organisation on the Left and indeed redefining the socialist project itself. It can't be done by evolving the Left stronger but in essentially the same form in which it already exists. It cannot be done without a rupture and change of relationships inside the labour movement. The labour movement is going to have to change the nature of its organisation, the nature of its hierarchies and its culture in order to reflect more accurately the actual range of forces and experiences which constitute 'the Left'. Until this internal transformation in the labour movement occurs you will not have an instrument that is capable of generalising the struggle for socialism to the working class on *all* the sites on which exploitation occurs, and indeed expanding it to the society as a whole.

the fundamentally diverse character of this thing which is called 'the Left'

I am not sanguine about the capacity of the Left to face up to the kind of fundamental reappraisal I believe to be necessary. Of course I am immensely strengthened by particular events – forms of resistance, both planned and unplanned, both in the formal labour movement and outside it, which have resisted or set limits to the encroachments of Thatcherism over the last three or four years. Of course, we have to find ways of building on those initiatives. But if you ask me to make a sober assessment of whether the popular reception of Labour's programme in 1983 represented an overwhelming vote of confidence by the majority of the population for a socialist programme – the claim which Tony Benn has recently made – I cannot tell you that this corresponds to my reading of the evidence. I certainly believe that people can be won for the socialist case, but it seems to me extremely dangerous in this respect to confuse what one would like to happen with what is happening.

I think, for example, that the failure of the Labour Party to be able to politicise and *generalise* the miners' strike, winning converts to this fundamental socialist case in all sectors of society, is one of the most crippling defeats that has already happened inside the labour movement. Because the political case for the miners has to be a case not confined to miners and mining communities only, or indeed to the trade unions, or indeed to the working class. It has to be a case which unites the cause of the class with the sense of justice and fairness to the communities with a wholly different conception of economic need and with a broader policy for energy. Precisely, it is an example of where, to win the class argument, class and society wide issues have to be constructed together into a broad, popular strategy, advancing and winning converts on several fronts at once. To fight it as a narrow, sectional, class issue is to lose its class content – and all the heroism which has sustained the strike, and the extraordinary new, emergent elements surfacing within it – the linkage of class and feminist activity, for example – will be of no avail if the right kind of politics cannot be developed, which is commensurate to the issue, and fights it in a way relevant to the current disposition of forces in society. For example, how could the miners 'win' unless by a politics which won back legitimacy for the trade unions and did something to reverse the tide of unpopularity which not only made the Right able to legislate against the unions with popular support, but resulted in a deep division of loyalty within the class itself?

How is a political case of this order to be built? It can only be built by the right kind of political leadership – a leadership *aware* of the hostile context in which it is operating. But, so far, all the politics of the Labour Party has been able to inject into the miners' strike is the delicate work of damage prevention, looking over its shoulder to make sure that the fall-out on the leadership was not too great. Now if that looks to you like a party with enough political imagination and 'feel' for the current situation to put itself at the head of the different forms of struggle and to take that struggle, not just into its own organisations, but out into society and to generalise the case for socialism on the basis of it, then I would yield to a more optimistic version of events. I honour Tony Benn's courageous efforts to 'gloss' the current situation in this way, but I regret to say that, on this issue, I believe he is whistling in the dark. □

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The Company (

Angela Carter has been described as 'the most consistently interesting and original writer of British fiction today'. Among her most recent books are *The Passion of New Eve* and *The Bloody Chamber*. The film *The Company of Wolves* is based on one of her short stories, and she also co-wrote the screenplay. This interview is taken from a session at *Marxism Today's* Left Alive.

Are you conscious of directing the reader to think in a certain way when you write?

It's very tricky because people are different and people have different responses to fiction. But it's impossible to direct and I think it wouldn't be a good thing if you could do it. Reading a book is like re-writing it for yourself. And I think that all fiction should be open-ended. You bring to a novel, anything you read, all your experience of the world. You bring your history and you read it in your own terms. And therefore it's impossible to quantify what the reaction should be. I went for a long time thinking that perhaps really I should write agitprop, but I couldn't see how I could. It would come out very odd, it would come out most peculiar. It would come out in such a way that I couldn't imagine anybody enjoying reading it. And this seemed to cut away, to pull the carpet out from under myself.

If you are writing propaganda you are using the conscious part of your mind to work out what you want to say. Do you do this with fiction? For example, could Countess P in Nights at the Circus *be Mrs Thatcher as well as other people – other villains?*

Well, of course, she's not really a character. She's a proposition. In that story there are two characters. There's the main character, the woman – Olga. And she's a proper rounded, three-dimensional character with a history and with a personality, with a lot of low peasant cunning. We know a lot about her. We know a little bit less about the person that she makes contact with. But it's obvious that it's a real person even though she's just hinted at. But the countess – she's the law, she's a certain kind of authority. And therefore she doesn't have to have a character. She doesn't have to have all this naturalistic apparatus, because all she has to do is sit in the chair and go round and round and round, and be authority. And therefore you can project upon her Mrs Thatcher or the Pope. She can be any authoritarian figure. One of the difficulties of writing fiction that's supposed to have a lot of meaning and can be read as allegory, is the tension between what people expect from the fiction, which is rounded three-dimensional characters that they can believe in, have empathy with, and the fact that that kind of character doesn't carry all that much meaning. They can't carry all that much freight of meaning. They can't be all that, unless you can try very hard and make them move out of character a lot. It's a problem that Brecht grappled with, quite successfully.

Do you think fiction that doesn't have that sort of credibility is also valid?

I'm not sure. I quite enjoy relaxing and writing about people with pimples and ticks because the way that you make a character in 'straight' fiction is actually quite simple. You make a sort of checklist of peculiarities. The first editor I ever had said 'well, say what kind of trousers he's wearing'. In fact, creating a believable character is something that is quite schematic. There used to be a thriller writer called Peter Cheyney and all the characters in his thrillers were chain-smokers. It took me about three years to work out why this was. It was because 'he lit a cigarette', 'he inhaled thoughtfully', 'he stubbed a cigarette out' – that's 25 words already and we're working towards a strict 60,000 words. There's all kinds of functionalism about mainstream fiction.

Can I ask you a question about your personal life, because I know you've just had a baby? How do you organise, how do you make time for work and have you had to redefine yourself as a mother?

It was a year ago. He falls over now. I can't answer the question because I haven't actually done very much work since he was born. I keep remembering J G Ballard, who is a single parent, saying how terrific it was that he's a writer because it meant that he could look after the children as well as earning a living. I keep holding on to that. I keep saying well surely if he can do it, dammit. But in fact really neither me nor my son's father have done very much work for the last year. I really don't know how I would have managed if I'd had children when I was young, before I'd established a body of work. I don't know what kind of a person I would have been, I might have been a much better writer. You can't guess these things. But certainly organising your life is almost impossible, especially when you're used to having a certain kind of rhythm of work which has to be completely changed. You only have so much time before it's necessary to go and pick a small person up. I was forced after 43 years of evasion, to come to terms with my own incompetence. There are lots of things that you can brush under the carpet about yourself until you're faced with somebody whose needs won't be put off. You can't actually tell them to go away and come back in five minutes. I realised that I'm actually an extremely incompetent person and I idle a lot. I've got to learn to live with that. But I think I was too old to redefine myself. I couldn't redefine myself as a mother. I'm proud of my child but I'm not proud of myself as a mother.

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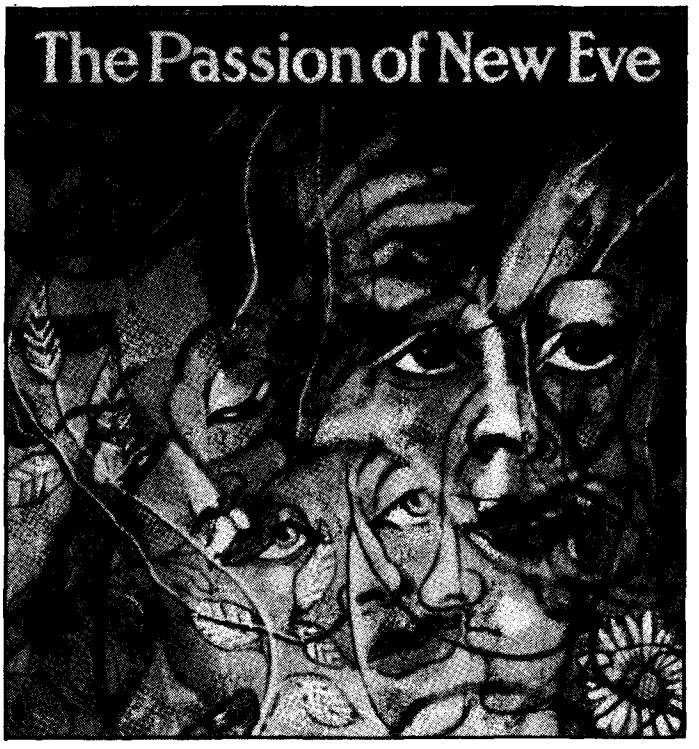
Angela Carter
An Interview



Surely you're wrong. Women much older than you are still redefining themselves everyday of their lives, as women and as people?

I know what you mean. Obviously you change. One changes all the time but I can't get into the habit of thinking that my being has changed completely just because I've done what most women do.

Do you make an effort to write differently when you are bringing male characters into your work?

One of the things that people always say about women writers is that the male characters lack credibility. So when I was a girl I made a conscious effort to make the male characters as credible as I possibly could and to write sometimes in the first person, male. It still didn't stop people criticising the writing. I suppose I do what I tell writing students: I occasionally get a young man sidling up to me and saying that he was very nervous about writing even the character of a woman, about *making* female characters, these days, because he thinks that we're all going to stand around hitting him with our handbags. And I say, this is perfectly correct, 'yes indeed. This is what will happen to you.' But what you must do if you want to create a really credible woman is just imagine what you yourself would do in a particular set of circumstances and that's what she'll do. Except things like pissing against walls. We tend not to put that in nowadays. One of my students wanted to write about a pregnant woman and I said 'have you ever felt seasick?' and he said 'well, yes'. And I said 'well, there you go.' If you start off everyday, except when you were lying down, seasick, you'd start realising what it's like. Obviously I try and exercise empathy with every person I'm writing about. It's part of the task to understand things.

How do you teach creative writing?

I teach on an MA course at the University of East Anglia. The students on it are very highly selected, are *extremely* highly motivated. Many of them have published quite a lot of work before they come. I see my function to do exactly as a copy editor in a publishing company does: to go through a piece of fiction and say, 'look he's wearing odd socks here, what do you precisely mean, here, would so-and-so say such a thing. What are you really trying to get at?' You have to start out with people who know what they're doing from the outset.

What about the people who can't get on a MA course in creative writing, who've had a minimal education? It's going to be a bleak future, isn't it?

Well, it didn't matter too much 100 years ago. We were producing very, very much better writers in this country when people were leaving school between twelve and fourteen. I don't mean to be intemperate but I think this is very important. Reading and *living* are the real training for writing fiction. This may sound smug but it's true. What usually happens is that people who actually need to do it will find the time. Often it doesn't work out. People can put themselves through the most extraordinary privations to write a novel. And then it turns out it's no good. I'm afraid that's life. It has happened to me and it was very embarrassing and painful. What I used to do before I wrote a movie and became successful was to organise my life so that I would save up in order to write a novel. I'd put aside money. I'd squirrel it away in building societies. I wrote my first novel in the evenings and at weekends. It was when I was still a student and I did the typing in the summer holiday. As I got better at it, as I became more and more absorbed in the actual work and craft, then it did take me more and more time and I had to do it more and more intensively. It wasn't possible to do it in a part-time dilettantish, hobbyish sort of way. Then I really did have to start thinking about organising my life in such a way that there would be time to write fiction. I used to do a great deal of journalism to regulate the cash flow. And I'd actually have to clear a lot of that away.

The Company of Wolves *and* The Bloody Chamber *both reveal an extraordinary empathy between human beings and animals.*

Well, we are animals, after all. I said this once to somebody after I'd read *The Company of Wolves* story. She was terribly upset. She said you mean we're nasty, hairy, dirty slavering *beasts*. No, no, no, it's all right. We're mammals. Bipeds, mammals, carnivorous bipeds, primates and everything. 'It's all right', I said. But she would not be comforted. It was as though a door had opened into hell. I realise I'm sentimental about furred and feathered beings but they're never dull. I have a minor but quite passionate interest in natural history, I'm a Darwinian. I like animals and I'm interested in animals. I'm also interested in human beings' projections upon animals of negative qualities, which very often the animals don't have. Take wolves – the film is a bit less of a libel on wolves than the story. But the story is an absolute libel on wolves. Wolves in the wild are really quite safe, they don't mess with human beings unless they're bothered by them. Their social organisation is somewhat fascistic but who in Britain is to complain about them. I'm interested in the division that Judo-Christianity has made between human nature and animal nature. None of the other great faiths in the world have got quite that

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division between us and them. None of the others has made this enormous division between birds and beasts who, as Darwin said, would have developed consciences if they'd had the chance, and us. I think it's one of the scars in Western Europe. I think it's one of the scars in our culture that we have too high an opinion of ourselves. We align ourselves with the angels instead of the higher primates.

Could we change track a bit and ask where you see yourself in the current debates in the contemporary women's movement on myths and metaphysics?

I'm quite old-fashioned about this. If you don't believe in metaphysics, and indeed you don't approve of metaphysics, then that puts you in a certain position anyway. I'm interested in justice, really. And I think you can do an awful lot more with legislation than people will permit themselves to believe. We seem to be going through a period when the idea that the situation is hopeless has got a certain kind of dark glamour. The idea that one can do nothing seems to be attractive. A lot of people said before the last election that it doesn't matter whether you vote Labour or Tory. They were capable of saying there's no difference between them but as far as the details of everyday life are concerned there's all the difference in the world. I suppose I regard myself as just a rank and file socialist feminist really. That's all. I worry a lot, obviously. The idea of the soul is a very attractive proposition but nobody has ever been able to prove it to me. I'm very pleased I don't have religion because all the great religions of the world concur in denying women's souls and that is such a relief. That is so wonderful.

In The Bloody Chamber *you are dealing with fairy tales. Folklore seems to be central to much of your writing?*

I'm a great admirer of folklore. Truly, I think the degree to which the bourgeoisie has appropriated the culture of the poor is very interesting, it's very shocking. Fairy tales are part of the oral tradition of Europe. They were simply the fiction of the poor, the fiction of the illiterate. And they're very precisely located.

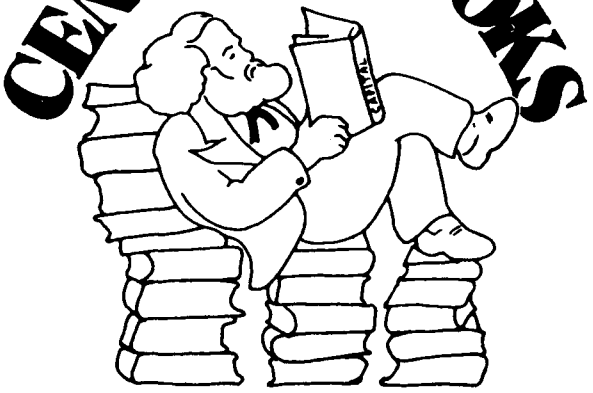
If you mention folklore in Britain, people's eyes glaze over with boredom. They associate it with people wearing white suits with bells round their legs. It is associated with the embarrassing, with the quaint. Therefore people are genuinely shocked when they look at Grimms' stories, which the Grimm brothers collected from the German peasants, to see them full of the most ghastly events. One of the stories that I don't deal with in *The Bloody Chamber* is about children who are left out in a wood because their parents would rather they starve out of their sight than under their eyes. This, of course, was an everyday fact of most people's lives in Europe until the industrial revolution. The imagery is perpetually enchanting because a lot of the imagery is the imagery of the unconscious; beautiful and refreshing, it refreshes the imagination. But the circumstances of the stories are simply transformed accounts of ordinary people's lives. It's something to do with Western Europe that these stories have gone into the bourgeois nursery and have been dissociated from the mainstream of culture.

Do you think there is anything escapist in your more recent work, especially say The Company of Wolves*? Does the success of the film have anything to do with the fact that we are living in a recession?*

I would hotly deny that the movie was a piece of escapism. If you gave me five minutes I would be able to construct an absolutely foolproof argument that would convince you that it was about the deep roots of our sexual beings. The Thatcherite censorship certainly found it subtly offensive. They couldn't put their finger on it but they knew something was wrong. Obviously, depression and recession are great for the entertainment industry and a certain kind of escapist movie is obviously going to be very big at this point in time. I don't think *The Company of Wolves* is that kind of film.

Do you feel that in the current political climate it is important that writers are more overt in their politics?

Yes, I suppose I do. There's a line in a poem of my youth, a poem by Alan Ginsberg called *Howl* in which he issues this dreadful warning: 'America, I am putting my queer shoulder to the wheel'. But that sense of weighty responsibility with which some writers approach this fills me with a kind of wild terror. I don't think art is as important as all that and I don't think you can do all that much with fiction. It does seem to me that artists, far from being the unconscious legislators of mankind, tend to be parasitic upon those in productive labour. And therefore we really have a big responsibility to deliver the goods. I mean most people would prefer to be artists than to work for Ford in Dagenham after all. Therefore there is a responsibility to deliver the goods, to cheer people up by suggesting that possibly there is hope. I feel that if we all put our queer shoulders to the wheel together, it may be possible to move it an inch, a quarter of an inch, a centimetre, shake it. But it's very difficult knowing where to start because a certain kind of bland quietism seems to have taken over the intelligentsia. □



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A hope and an experiment gone badly wrong. France represents one of the Left's great disappointments. The question is why?

LE FIN

France Abandons Socialism

Keith Dixon & Daniel Perraud

MAJOR CHANGES ARE now under way on the French political scene. After three years of apparent unity, the Left has broken up once again, with the Communists (the PCF) moving into opposition against a homogeneous Socialist government intent on pursuing 'realistic' policies which have little in common with its initial promises. In every conceivable area of government policy, from the treatment of immigration to the relations with the developing countries, the reorientation has been spectacular. The Socialists who only a few years back were promising France's 3½ million immigrant population the right to vote in local elections are dealing with the immigration 'problem' through increased controls and repatriation offers. In foreign affairs, traditionally the special preserve of the President under the 5th Republic, despite high expectations raised by Mitterrand's Cancun speech in 1981 and his initial support for Nicaragua, the Socialist President has in fact taken over Gaullist practice lock, stock and barrel, particularly in Africa, whilst abandoning de Gaulle's fundamental hostility to the US. The result has been the tampering in Chad and the Lebanon, and pro-US alignment on the Euromissiles issue.

On the home front, economic priorities have been reversed, with the fight against inflation taking over from the reduction of the unemployment rate as the Government's prime objective. Structural and social reforms have been postponed indefinitely, a wage freeze has been imposed on the public sector, there have been calls for more 'realism' in the working class, and a far more overtly accommodative attitude towards employers has been adopted. Since the arrival of Fabius in Matignon, and the split between socialists and communists, the themes of 'national unity' and 'modernisation' have become the rallying call of the *mitterrandistes*.

All the indicators of public support, from opinion polls to national elections, show not only that the parties of the Left are increasingly isolated but also that the comeback of the Right is being operated along lines largely influenced by the ideas of the new Right. Nobody now would seem seriously to defend the idea that the Left has even an outsider's chance of winning the legislative elections in 1986. The parties of the Right are now taking their victory so much for granted that their major preoccupation in this respect is whether or not they will accept coexistence with a Socialist President (Mitterrand's term in office does not end until 1988).

The impetus for progressive reform has thus been lost, under parliamentary and extra-parliamentary pressure from the Right. The recent period is exemplary: the Government has been forced to back down on two major issues, the reform of the press and the unification of the school system. In the first case, the attempt to break the monopolistic hold of press baron and ex-nazi, Robert Hersant, was presented successfully as an attack on pluralism. The proposed changes in the school system, mapped out in Savary's Education Bill, met with a barrage of criticism from private school parents' associations and the Catholic hierarchy, who saw them as undermining religious freedom and individual choice. Thus the financial privileges and unfair recruitment practices of the denominational schools have been maintained after a series of mass demonstrations of protest throughout France.

A full and convincing explanation of the present crisis on the French Left and the concomitant turnabout in government policy cannot however draw solely on the vicissitudes of the last three and a half years of left government. It may be necessary but it is inadequate to describe and denounce the rightward drift of the Socialist government: it is certainly unproductive to attribute this to the inherent vices of social democracy. What is needed is a clearer understanding of the long-term process of social and ideological change which has made this shift not only inevitable, but even desirable for some within the French Socialist movement.

1968 revisited

There is general agreement that the French economy and class structure have undergone profound changes in the post-war period: decline in the weight of agriculture within the economy, growth of tertiary activities, emergence of new white-collar strata industries, changes in the composition of the working class as traditional manufacturing industry declined. And these changes were of course reflected in the trade union and political spheres. Thus in the mid-60s the formerly Catholic CFDT emerged to become a major competitor/partner of the CGT, drawing its membership largely from the new intermediate strata of white collar workers, and also from the 'new' working class recently arrived from the countryside. By the late 60s the Socialist Party, founded by Francois Mitterrand and various small Socialist groupings including the once powerful SFIO (*Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière*), was attempting to give political expression to the aspirations of these new strata.

These changes which modified both the class structures and traditional modes of trade union and political expression found a spectacular echo in the much mythologised events of May 1968. At the time, the PCF although extremely suspicious of the ideology of the student movement nonetheless analysed the May revolt and the general strike which it sparked off as a new phase in the revolutionary struggle which would bring increasingly into play these new social forces of the intermediate strata alongside the working class. This

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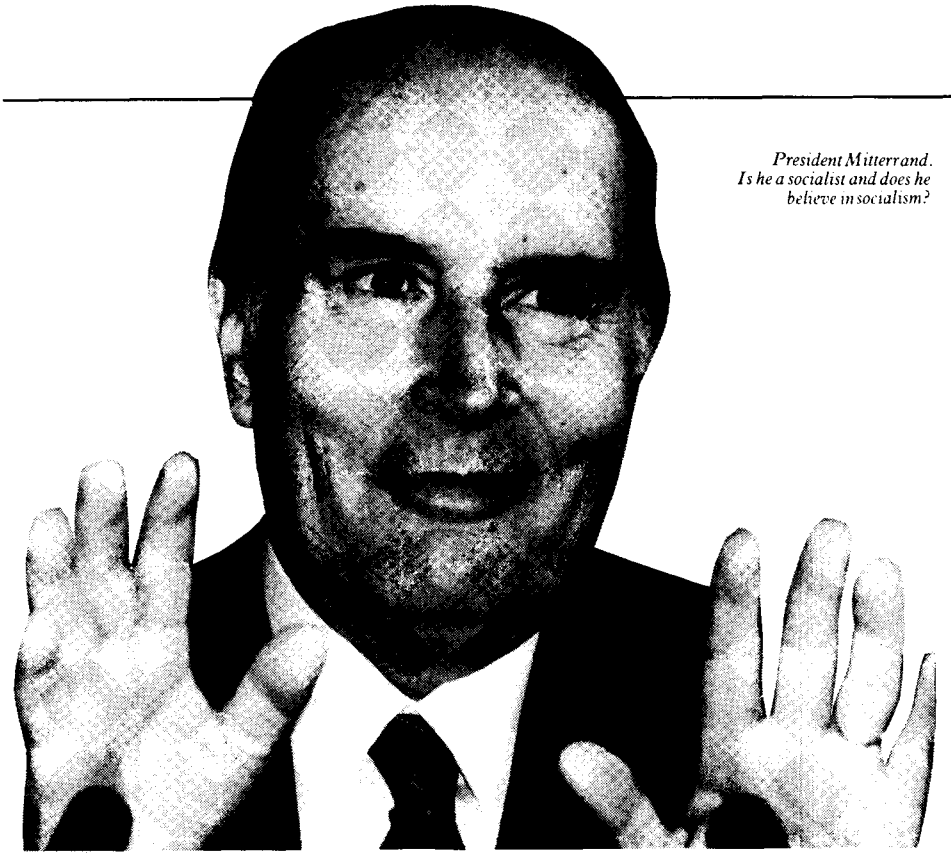

President Mitterrand. Is he a socialist and does he believe in socialism?

was to be the anti-monopolist alliance in embryo.

Unfortunately, developments in France over the last fifteen years have not confirmed this somewhat optimistic analysis. With hindsight, what now seems of greater historical significance in the movement which led to de Gaulle's downfall was that it was the first significant political battle of a mass nature since the war to have broken with the traditional 'bipolar' alignment of forces (Right vs Left: labour vs capital). These strata and their student vanguard of 1968 had no clear political objectives apart from drawing attention to their uneasy existence within the conventional framework of French politics. They oscillated throughout the late 60s and early 70s between diverse and contradictory 'host ideologies'. Their first but not final landing-place was the fashionable ultra-leftism of that period, which extended from the populist 'Maoism' of the *Cause du Peuple* to the more severe Trotskyism of groups like *Lutte Ouvrière* or the *Ligue Communiste* whose membership rose dramatically.

While the French communists concentrated their efforts on trying to marginalise these *groupuscules*, considered to be poaching on communist ground, the new Socialist Party entertained ambiguous relations with them. In fact it managed to syphon off quite a number of their activists. Few realised at the time that the ideological developments in these strata, the 'spirit of 1968' (libertarian critique of the state; rejection of the 'superpowers'; individualism and suspicion of both the leaders *and* the traditional organisations of the working class) would not disappear with the eclipse of the *groupuscules* but would soon find new and unlikely homes.

the Left was taken very much unawares as doctors, peasants, lawyers and lorry-owners took to the streets

It is perhaps in this light that the period of the Common Programme of the Left (1972-1977) should be reappraised. The Left although apparently growing in strength was in fact deriving benefit from the *ambiguous* situation created by the May events. Despite its electoral results the Gaullist Right had been severely weakened, and was having to cope with an enemy 'from within' in the persona of Valèry Giscard d'Estaing. By the mid 70s the fever had fallen in the new middle strata who were increasingly turning their support towards the traditional Left, and above all to the Socialist Party. This shift of support had contradictory effects. Throughout the 70s the Left undoubtedly benefitted from it, by widening its social base and renovating its ideological arsenal. Thus during this period there was a growing awareness on the Left of the problems raised by the women's movement, the regionalists and the environmentalists. The notion of *autogestion* (self-management and decentralised local control) was widely debated. However, many of the 68 thinkers who were rapidly promoted to positions of authority in the non-communist Left brought with them their fundamental hostility towards what they considered to be the traditional 'dogmas' of the Left, which in the French context had been so heavily influenced by Marxism.

Alongside these developments within the Left, the Right increasingly came to dominate French intellectual life in the mid/late 70s, with an onslaught on these 'dogmas' one of its central features. The active young rightwing intellectuals of the *Club de l'Horloge* and the *GRECE* embarked on what some of them described as a Gramscian strategy of reconquering cultural and ideological hegemony. Aided by the economic recession and the discredit which had fallen on a post-Keynesian welfare state unable to provide solace in hard times, they developed an individualist, anti-statist and virulently pro-capitalist ideology which was fuelled by disparate strands of extreme right thinking. The positions on which the French Left had built its postwar ethical hegemony (anti-racism, anti-fascism, egalitarianism, rejection of capitalist virtues of efficiency and profit-making) were to be lifted with the combined, if eclectic, help of sociobiology, historical revisionism, and the strident ultra-liberalism of Hayek and Friedman. These new Right efforts to undermine the intellectual dominance of the Left were undoubtedly aided by the parallel attempts of the so-called 'new philosophers' of the late 70s to give respectability to their rabid anti-sovietism by marketing the notions of dissidence and anti-totalitarianism.

The fate of the PCF

The major victim of these ideological changes in the 70s was, of course, the PCF. For two reasons, however, the PCF seemed to enjoy a much stronger position during this period than was actually the case. Firstly, although it remained camped on its still substantial areas of dominance in the industrial working class, the strategy of left unity which it developed successfully from the late 60s enabled it to maintain a marginal hold on strata outside the working class, in particular on a substantial body of intellectuals.

Secondly, for reasons relating to modern French history (the resistance, anti-colonial struggles in Vietnam and Algeria, etc) the PCF was still held in respect, and therefore 'protected' by many influential figures within the intelligentsia, even those

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who fundamentally disagreed with its policies. The PCF benefitted from the anti-fascist, anti-colonialist consensus upheld by intellectuals like Sartre, de Beauvoir or Max-Pol Fouchet: a consensus in which blatant anti-communism or anti-sovietism were stigmatised, the role played by the PCF during the resistance recognised, and the working class political activism represented by the PCF respected. When, in the late 70s, left unity split irreparably, and the ideology of anti-totalitarianism took over from that of anti-fascism in the intelligentsia, the PCF's objective isolation within French society became clear for all to see.

The spectacular decline of the PCF from the late 70s, which has recently been confirmed in the European elections, must be situated in this context. Alternative explanations which stress the pro-sovietism of the PCF, the inability of its functionaries to understand the changes taking place in French society, or the undemocratic internal organisation of the Party may all cast some light on this process, but they do not get to the roots of the problem. The pro-Sovietism of the PCF, for example, is less marked now than it was 15 years ago, despite the turnabout in the 1978-1981 period which led to approval of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and disapproval of Solidarity.

What is striking, however, in this respect, and has undoubtedly undermined communist influence, is that the PCF, after abandoning the Soviet model, has been incapable of replacing this coherent frame of reference with a persuasive critique (be it favourable or unfavourable) of 'actually existing socialism'. The new philosophers and their followers spotted this fatal weakness and have made tremendous political capital out of it. It is now their manichean vision of socialism which informs French public opinion, and not anything that may be said by the PCF.

More than just a bad start. . .

By the time the Left arrived in power in May 1981 the PCF, with its invaluable reservoir of working class activism, had been weakened and marginalised. Moreover, the Socialist-Communist coalition had only just been patched together after three years of division and mutual recriminations. The labour movement was disunited and demoralised, and the trade unions (CGT and CFDT) were rapidly losing membership. All this was in stark contrast with previous periods of Left government ('36 and '45) which had been the result of sustained popular struggles.

At the same time, the national and international dimensions of the economic crisis had been minimised by the Left as it heaped blame on the ruling right-wing parties throughout the 70s for France's economic difficulties. This was particularly true of the Socialist Party, which now dominated the Left coalition, and whose economists totally underestimated the objective constraints weighing on the French economy. Their forecasts of an upturn in international economic activity by 1982 which would boost France's reflationary efforts turned out to be pure fantasy. The effects of the crisis on social behaviour and expectations were also overlooked. Thus, for example, growing popular hostility towards the state, and the increasingly emotive demand for 'security' in an apparently insecure world – which the radical Right has since made the most of – were hardly taken into account.

In such conditions, and despite the landslide nature of the Socialist victory of 1981, there was to be no mobilisation of popular support. This in turn encouraged

> the drift. . . towards what might be called 'Thatcherism with a human face' has been unavoidable

the *technocratic, statist tendencies* within the Left government. Notwithstanding its rhetoric, these were already strong within the Socialist Party where an increasing body of high-flying technocrats, often reared in France's elitist *grandes écoles*, had moved into positions of power. (This was true within the Socialist Party, but even more so of the 'collaborators' and advisors of the various ministries). Such trends were to weigh heavily on the evolution of the Government's policies – particularly after the apparent failure of the economic strategy of 'reflation in one country'.

Adapt or resist?

An appraisal of the first year of Left government, and in particular of the turnabout in June 1982, is of crucial importance for interpreting what has happened since. The now orthodox explanation provided by supporters of the abandonment of the reflationary policy (and *de facto* of the Left's programme) is one of the so-called economic realism: a necessary shift from impractical idealism to *real politik*. This is the line which has been systematically defended by the economic commentators of *Le Monde*, for example. The strategy implemented by the Mauroy government in the initial period, which consisted of extensive nationalisations, greater trade union rights, and above all reflation of the economy by pumping in increased purchasing power and reorienting industry towards the reappropriation of the home market, was – so the argument goes – doomed to failure. When unforeseen obstacles loomed at the end of the first year (balance of payments deficit, high inflation, growing unemployment etc) there was no alternative but to abandon the outmoded Marxist dogmatism (by now a familiar theme. . .) which had inspired the initial programme and to *adapt* to the constraints imposed by the open nature of France's economy and a predominantly hostile international environment.

It would be absurd to deny the existence of such constraints: we have suggested, on the contrary, that they had not been sufficiently taken into account before the Left arrived in power. The question was however whether to adapt or to resist, and if there was to be resistance, *how* to resist. This could not have been done without the active mobilisation of popular support around a political project which had at least the same mystique as that being proposed elsewhere by Thatcherism or Reaganism.

The notion of *autogestion*, which figured in both Socialist and Communist programmes before 1981, but was rapidly abandoned afterwards, could well have been the dynamic element in such a project. With its insistence on decentralised, popular control, both in and out of the work place, and its radical critique of Jacobin and statist tendencies on the Left, it commanded support well beyond the traditional social base of the Left. A call for local initiative and involvement as a necessary complement to the Left's parliamentary battles, and as an antidote to right wing resistance, might also have allayed fears of growing bureaucracy and 'too much government'.

It is only in such a context that the Government might have been able to match its ambitious objectives of social transformation with the *means* necessary to attain them – without releasing an anti-statist backlash. As both the PCF and the CERES (the Left tendency in the Socialist Party) were arguing at the time, such measures included the radical expropriation of major owners of nationalisable industries, the construction of an industrial policy directed towards the home market in which the nationalised indus-

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Former President De Gaulle.

Paris, 1968. Where has all the inspiration gone?

tries would play a key role, stricter controls over the movement of capital, planned trade etc. Such a strategy would doubtless have met with resistance at home and abroad, but it could also have contributed to mobilising people whose expectations had been raised by radical electoral promises from the Left up until 1981. ('Everything is possible' proclaimed a Socialist Party poster in the run-up to the 1981 elections). The feeling of betrayal which was quick to set in and sour relations between the governmental parties and their supporters (and which explains the high level of abstention of Left voters in recent elections) might thus have been avoided.

A much clearer idea of which social strata could and should be counted on in a process of accelerated social change, and which strata were likely to resist would also have been a most valuable asset in this period. The underestimation of political resistance to the Left not only among the major capitalists, but also among other substantial strata of the population (the farmers, the non-salaried middle class etc) had been a common feature of the theoretical analyses of both the PCF and the Socialist Party in the pre-1981 period, intent as they were on developing the idea of a 'broad front'. The practical consequence of this was that the Left was taken very much unawares as doctors, peasants, lawyers and lorry-owners took to the streets in violent reaction to left wing reforms.

The rightward drift

Faced with growing resistance at home, serious economic difficulties, multiple pressures from outside (for example, the role of West Germany in European Monetary System negotiations on the devaluation of the franc), but perhaps above all a loss of confidence in the solutions and objectives as initially proposed, the Government began to back down from March 1982. Given the ideological changes discussed earlier, resistance to such a shift had been already largely undermined in the Socialist Party and in the population as a whole. The PCF and a few figures on the Socialist Left had become voices in the wilderness. Rather than attempting a critical reappropriation of anti-statist positions, and thus perhaps stemming the rising tide of neo-liberalism, the Government simply gave in to neo-liberal attacks from the Right, but also from within its own ranks. Since then, the drift down the slope towards what might be called 'Thatcherism with a human face' has been unavoidable.

As the efforts of the Mauroy government became concentrated on squeezing out inflation by austerity, a new political and economic strategy emerged. This consisted of holding up social reforms (the promised 35 hour week, for example) and spreading the burden of effort away from employers and toward the middle strata (through tax reform and forced saving measures) and on to the working class (by an increase in indirect taxes in the latest budget, for example). With Reaganistic fervour, the Ministers of Finance in the second Mauroy government and the present Fabius administration have been preaching public spending cuts and wage restraint. A government attempt to hold public sector wage increases below inflation gave rise to a one-day strike by public sector employees in October of this year.

Along the same lines, the management boards of the newly nationalised industries have been encouraged, to their relief, to behave as if they were running private firms (the spectre of workers' control having been definitively banished). Economic planning has been pushed back into the cupboard in which Giscard d'Estaing had dumped it in the 70s, and the industrial policy which was to match the ambitious objective of 'reconquering the home market' has never materialised. Austerity, efficiency, modernisation, and competitiveness have become the catch-phrases of a government which came into power three years ago promising to put 'imagination in power'.

Despite the undoubted shift to the right in French public opinion, this Socialist change of heart would seem to be reaping virtually no electoral benefits. On the contrary, the Right has been making the most of broken Socialist promises and the continuingly poor economic performance. Opinion polls now show Mitterrand to be the most unpopular president since the beginning of the 5th Republic, and now that the novelty effect is wearing off Fabius too is slipping down the ratings.

Dim prospects

However hard the Fabius government may be trying to put across a new image of no-nonsense modernism, lauding the profit motive and the spirit of entrepreneurship, the parties of the Right are continuing to make headway. They have in fact achieved success in the most unlikely areas. Thus on the question of human rights and civil liberties (hardly a strong

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point of the French Right while in power), the Left has been pushed on to the defensive. A powerful campaign relayed by influential sectors of the media continues to insinuate that France is on the slippery road towards a totalitarian state: this was a major argument in the recent debate on school reform.

Under de Gaulle, Pompidou and Giscard the traditional parties of the Right had gradually abandoned the terrain of mass politics to the Socialist and Communist opposition. Their electoral defeat in 1981 has galvanised them, transforming their leaders from functionaries into political activists. The neo-Gaullist RPR and more recently the ultra-Right *Front National* have been highly successful in orchestrating, or at least drawing political benefit from, popular manifestations of discontent: everything from disobedience campaigns in the police force to violent street demonstrations by farmers.

The Right, however, is still having some problems in getting its act together before 1986. The present political jostling for the position of front-runner between Chirac, Barre and Giscard d'Estaing certainly weakens the thrust of the Right's attacks on the Government. The recent triumphant re-election of Giscard as a member of parliament, and the growing popularity of ex-prime minister Raymond Barre in certain right wing circles, are seriously threatening the predominance obtained by Chirac during the first two years of Socialist administration. Moreover, the rise of the *Front National*, which obtained 10.9% of the votes in the European elections this spring, has caused a certain amount of embarrassment and a great deal of cacophony on the Right.

Initially encouraged as a useful ginger group, especially by Chirac's party, the Front is now stealing support and members from the RPR. By accelerating the radicalisation of the Right, it has forced the two traditional parliamentary formations to adjust to the new political landscape, and above all to state their intentions concerning present or future alliances with the neo-fascists. For the time being the rise of Le Pen and behind him a strong current of authoritarian racist opinion is preventing the RPR and the UDF from deriving maximum political benefit from the growing hegemony of right wing ideas. The presence of Le Pen in any broad right coalition is more than likely to scare off centrist support: his absence reduces the chances of the Right obtaining an overall majority in parliament.

there is once again a vacuum on the French Left in which radical politics could flourish

Overall though there's not much to write home about in the present French situation. Even the present mobilisation of part of the trade union movement (the CGT in particular) in the car industry, or recently against the closure of Creusot-Loire, is essentially defensive, and without any clear political perspective. The only consolation, and a paltry one at that, for those who hoped for a socialist transformation of French society when the Socialist-Communist coalition came into power in 1981 is that there is once again a vacuum on the French Left in which radical politics could flourish. The Socialist Party, at present casting out for new allies on the centre-left is unlikely to command the initiative in this field. Perhaps the PCF because of the very dramatic nature of its decline – it is now a matter of change or disappear – could be capable of undertaking the renovation necessary to take up this challenge? □

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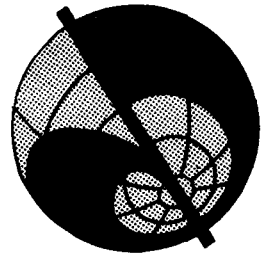

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ADVERTISING FOR A CHANGE

Interview with Johnny Wright

Traditionally the Left has viewed advertising as the devil incarnate. But the success of the GLC's *Say No To No Say* campaign in capturing Londoners' imagination seems to show that the Left should take advertising seriously. Johnny Wright of Wright and Partners and now of Ayer Barker has suffered from this distrust but still argues for advertising as a serious tool for change. Here he talks to Brian Hipkin and reflects on his work on the Labour Party's 1983 general election campaign and on advertising in general.

Can we turn firstly to the Labour Party campaign. How did your agency come to handle the Labour Party account?

It started with an article in *Campaign*, our trade magazine, which ran a profile of me in May 1981. In the course of the article there was a one liner that said that I was a supporter of the Labour Party. The Labour Party then came to see us and we did a bit of to-ing and fro-ing with the publicity director who was then Max Madden. Max appointed us to work on the local elections in early May 1982 and we did a poster campaign. In some ways this was probably the best work we did for the Labour Party; it was properly done, we had time to do it and it was properly researched. Unfortunately it went up on April 2 which was the same day as Galtieri went into the Falklands so as a news item it didn't quite make it. I think it was well received by the party but it was impossible to say whether or not it had any effect on the general public.

Then a few months later Max Madden left and in due course was replaced by Nick Grant. Nick came from COHSE, he didn't have much advertising experience and obviously no experience to help steer us through a general election. Of course Michael Foot, Jim Mortimer and many of the other key people organising the Labour Party during 1983 also lacked this experience. Then in May Thatcher called a general election which I think most people expected. What followed was the most frenetic period of my life or the life of anybody involved in our agency. We produced something like six full page press ads, 2 48-sheet posters, 14 quarter page ads, plus back up materials such as car stickers, window stickers and lapel badges and so on, and many of these were produced overnight. We also produced 105 minutes of broadcast time, 5 10-minute television party political broadcasts, 4 10-minute and 3 5-minute radio slots, and all this with an agency of 20 employees is quite incredible. I find it incredible to this day that we survived that period, physically as much as anything else.

We began to see some of the internal problems of the Labour Party. The campaign was changed marginally – we think for the worst – from *think positive/vote Labour,* to *think positive/act positive/vote Labour* which was clumsy and not a great line. People have accused us of producing a boring campaign anyhow. I find it very difficult to look at it objectively. One thing we do know is that the basic theme which was researched very well, certainly touched a chord with the electorate. Ironically, it's also proceeded to win some advertising awards which makes us feel warm but is irrelevant to the general scheme of things.

What was your relationship with the Labour Party as a client like?

As it became very clear that Labour were probably going to lose the election, to lose disastrously, we, amongst others, came under a degree of criticism a great deal of which was based on prejudice. This takes us back to one basic problem which the Labour Party has to face up to, which is the role of advertising, not just for the general election but for the party as a whole. We found them. . . not difficult to work with on a personal basis, but unsatisfactory to work with because they wouldn't involve us in all the strategic discussion which agencies have to be involved in if they are going to work with *any* client successfully. On the whole it is true to say that the further left the Walworth Road employee was the more 'anti' they were. On the NEC there was certainly a degree of hostility and Dennis Skinner described us as 'the dregs of the advertising industry', which we felt was probably a compliment but we're not sure. I understand they are now going back

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to considering not using an agency next time but using a team of committed helpers, which will be disastrous because you need the machinery to produce the work.

We used to find it somewhat annoying when we worked literally through the night to change something and we would find the Walworth Road people swanning into the first meeting in the morning and starting off with yet another criticism. But that's something you live with. I wouldn't have missed it for the world, it was easily the most interesting advertising experience I've ever had or probably ever will have. And I think that certainly goes for all the people who were internally involved.

Interestingly enough, the Tory Party never had a campaign theme, in fact they didn't run a campaign they wrote a series of very hard hitting one-off ads, things like Foot Pump and the Communist Manifesto and so on. . . They all had nothing to do with each other, they were all tactically very finely tuned to a specific group of people or specific issue. I think the Labour Party would do well to look at the way they developed a tactical campaign rather than a strategic campaign. We started work on the general election about five weeks beforehand and that's not enough. We wouldn't think of launching a new brand of washing-up liquid or a can of soup in anything under nine months to a year and that's rather more trivial than advertising a major political party.

Did you see yourself during the campaign as being in competition with Saatchi and Saatchi or being in competition with the Tory Party?

Oh with the Tory Party, the other agency was irrelevant. I know a lot of people at Saatchi very well, particularly Tim Bell who was master minding it and indeed I talked to him two or three times during the campaign. There was a mole at Saatchi so we knew what they were doing and we actually destroyed all the stuff that we were being sent and never released it. It wouldn't have done anybody all that much good but I have infinite respect for them as an agency. Apart from their success, they also do produce good work.

Groups such as the GLC and ILEA and the Spastics Society are increasingly turning to creative agencies to mount campaigns for them. What do these campaigns achieve both for the clients and for the image of the advertising world itself?

Well certainly visibility. People are much more aware and conscious of the GLC and what it stands for and what it's trying to do. If you look in the charitable area, this agency handles *Save the Children Fund*; Wright & Partners in fact are still handling the UNICEF account and there is no doubt that we have been able to build fund-raising through the use of creative advertising, rather than just saying fill this coupon in and help support UNICEF. One of the ads that we've just produced for UNICEF, the African emergency in fact, got one single cheque of a million pounds. It was from the Government: the minister in question saw the ad and said we have to have more support for UNICEF. In a week they just sent a million which is probably the most successful single ad that's ever run anywhere in the world.

The effectiveness of things like the GLC campaign are much more difficult to measure but I suspect that the total campaigns that have been conducted have made a lot more people of all political persuasions more supportive of the GLC than they were two years ago. I suspect most people have moved from being indifferent to supporting it rather than from anti to pro. Just the very awareness is heightened. The arrival of Big Brother government is frightening people.

You've been involved in advertising left issues, do you think that generally they are harder to get across than conservative or right-wing issues?

That's very difficult to answer. One of the roles of advertising in this area is that you are talking to your own supporters almost as much as you are to the other side. I think that's probably the key role of political advertising. I don't actually believe that political advertising does very much in the way of persuading or changing people's minds or attitudes.

One of the problems of my being involved with the Left (I use that term in a broad sense) is that internally there is more suspicion of us as a body of people and of the work we do and the role of that work. It varies from downright hostility to advertising as being a tool of capitalism to those who think that it is a way of informing people which is what the basic function is. But there are, I am glad to say, a number of people and I think Neil Kinnock is certainly one of those people, who recognise it as a means of fast and controlled communication with the electorate. These are powerful tools, they are also the tools of the opposition used effectively and whether you like it or not you will be judged on that as a measure of how you appear to the public. I don't think advertising has ever won or lost an election and I can't see it ever doing so. However, there have been one or two memorable advertising moments, mostly initiated by the Tories. I would guess that it is more difficult to handle the Left than the Right because of the sort of people who are involved in the Tory Party, like Nigel Lawson and Cecil Parkinson. I am sure they arrive at decisions with far less pain and far more quickly than we would be able to.

Can we move on now to look more generally at the advertising market. The Advertising Standards Authority have the slogan 'Legal, Honest, Decent and Truthful' as a checklist. Some people have argued that adverts can be misleading, they often fail to present an accurate picture of ordinary life – women, men, ethnic minorities etc. Much has been made recently in the advertising press and the Guardian *for example of the new 'imperfect' family in J. Walter Thomson's Oxo adverts. This is meant to be as a result of pressure from women but some people would say that it still sees women serving the interests of the family. What is your reaction to these so-called new progressive images?*

Well one thing is a fact about advertising: it doesn't lead, it comes along after the fact and usually some time after. I'm sure if you look at Oxo Katie ads from 1960-65, 1970-75 and in 1980, you would see a change and it would be reflecting, two or three years behind, the changes in society. This is I think a totally healthy relationship, and, I'm sure it is always some way behind which is why it comes in for criticism. Having said that there are of course exceptions where there have been insulting ads. Not only are they few and far between but they are fewer and further between than they used to be. But I think sometimes there is a degree of insensitivity by manufacturers particularly and to a lesser extent by the agencies. But the key thing to remember is that advertising comes along behind and it doesn't change attitudes, it reflects them.

Women do appear in adverts, albeit in stereotyped ways, but blacks as ordinary members of society, don't really seem to be there. The only two black people currently in television adverts are Lenny Henry with the

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Smiths' Square Crisps and the rather anonymous black cashier in the Bold 3 advert. Why do you think blacks are invisible in adverts?

I would suspect that both agencies and manufacturers are nervous of using minorities. I don't think it's a racist thing. . . I don't think it's racist in the sense of not allowing black people to appear. It's never cropped up as an issue where I have been involved. I suspect that if you talked to Proctor & Gamble who make Bold 3 they will say that 5% of the population in this country are black and therefore we will reflect that across our brand. We have 107 people in our commercials and we will have two blacks. That's the way they operate.

Advertising raises a number of moral issues – cigarette advertising, for example, the Benson & Hedges style of cigarette advertising. Many people believe that agencies dealing with such accounts are glossing over the moral issues.

I think the Benson & Hedges advertising is brilliant communication. There is a theory that the campaign has been developed all along in the belief that in time they will not be allowed to advertise at all and they will be able to put up the same sort of surreal posters without showing cigarettes at all. If that's true I think it is a very smart piece of forward thinking. But I detest cigarette advertising, I wouldn't work on it myself.

Many people involved in community and left organisations have been very suspicious of advertising. What would you say to reassure them?

Advertising's basic job is to inform and persuade; the use of advertising to reach people is provenly effective in all sorts of ways and not in just flogging what many people see as unnecessary consumer goods. For people on the Left to be suspicious of advertising *per se* is unwarranted unless they do not want to communicate because it's one of the best ways of communicating and it is controllable. To refuse to use advertising as a weapon, I think, hands it to the opposition. It so happens that the opposition use it well and I think the sooner that the whole of the Labour Party takes a very real commitment to using the right sort of weapons against the Tories the better. Otherwise we'll face 1988 as we went through in 1983 – with underprepared, wrongly-used resources – and we will lose badly.

Minder. Arthur (George Cole) and Terry (Dennis Waterman) on the campaign trail for Arthur in a by-election.

A CLASS OF ITS OWN

Alan Clarke

Arthur Daley and Terry McCann are rapidly becoming the most successful double act on television at the moment. With the sad death of Eric Morecambe the *Minder* Christmas special will be the highlight of many people's festive viewing. The series has slipped into the popular memory with remarkable ease, to such a degree that you can now talk of doing 'an Arthur Daley' and his voiceover can be heard advertising Mobil's latest money game.

The force of the series comes from the constant re-working of the contradictions of the characters' class positions. To put it at its most simple, Arthur Daley has all the trappings of the middle class entrepreneur and Terry his paid working class labourer. However the series has developed to such a degree that this picture becomes ridiculous to any viewer. The tension is created through the difference between the pretence of the characters and their actual accomplishment. So Arthur has all the stereotyped symbols of success – his car, his suits and his club – and yet can never quite convince the audience of his right to belong to the middle classes. You only have to look at his club, The Winchester, to realise that all is not what it appears. Arthur does not belong to a select West End gentleman's club but rather chooses to drink in an East End after hours drinking club. The fact that he refers to it as 'his club' may give some of his business acquaintances the wrong idea but he cannot be held responsible for what people think.

This leads on to the other tension which works very successfully throughout the series: the moral dimension. There is a strong distinction between the respectable characters and the disreputable ones. To complicate the issue there is no easy correlation between class position and respectability. Some of the biggest villains are the most affluent members of the cast. Again Arthur's position is central to this as he is not dishonest enough to be completely fraudulent and although keen to indulge in sharp practice is quite often the victim himself. The defining feature of Arthur's behaviour is that there is no malice in his actions, he might be conning people out of their money but they are the sort of people who can afford it. He might sell falsely labelled goods but the people who are buying them do not expect them to be genuine. The series adopts a very tough line on those people who are seen to be exploiting the poor or the defenceless, with Arthur and Terry carrying the banner of the little person for revenge and justice. The constant desire to find a new angle somewhere nearly within the law pushes the series on and provides the rationale for the programme but, in itself, it is not enough to explain the popularity of the series.

It is the way it deals with the class positions of the characters that provides the edge to the drama. Arthur's aspirations to the middle class come unstuck every time he is in the presence of any one with money – or the appearance of money. He is shown as being uncomfortable, using the

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wrong phrases and desperately trying to keep up with the Joneses. There was a good example of this in an episode where Arthur found himself involved in a smuggling operation and dealing with a self-styled commander. At the yacht club the two members order pink gins, Arthur declines and orders a pink vodka instead. The humour comes from the failure to handle the social skills of the middle class. It reasserts Arthur's roots with the working class and distances him from the smooth operating corruption of the middle class. Terry, on the other hand, admits to knowing nothing of the ways of sophisticated society, often mocking the pretensions of Arthur and his well-to-do friends. The humour here works by laughing with the character rather than at the person in a difficult situation and it pulls the audience into a closer identification with the hero.

Terry is very much a part of the people. He is part of the local community and everybody knows him as a friend, as a mate. This is a particular construction of a part of London in which the series develops. If the planners are worried about the lost sense of community in large cities, they should take encouragement from *Minder*. Here is a network of people completely integrated and self supporting – if people go outside the community it is by choice not because they could not find whatever they wanted within the network. Somebody always knows a bloke who can fix you up with just what you are looking for. Usually there is already a supply in one of Arthur's lock-ups but if not it can be found for you at just the right price. It is an idea of London which has been seen before. It is the community of the Ealing Films, the comradeship from the days of *The Passport to Pimlico* and the spirit of the postwar films is echoed strongly. The image produced is one of a weary, but still essentially happy, working class. Put upon but not downtrodden. The characters of the people shine through and reinforce the will to carry on. Arthur is just a 1980s equivalent of the Blackmarket spiv – so convincingly portrayed by George Cole in his younger days in the St Trinian's films.

These historical references also inform other contemporary forms of popular culture. Everyone knows that not all Londoners are Cockneys but there is a recognisable London voice, and a style of presentation, which means London to the millions of people outside the capital. This means that you can get away with Chas and Dave being described as 'Rockney' because they capture the old style of popular working class entertainment of the sing song in the pub. Jim Davison plays on the same identification. All these instances, and there are many others from Max Bygraves to the recreation of Flanagan and Allen, help to produce an image of London as a busy city with bustling communities.

When you see the community, Terry with his mates, and Arthur with all his old contacts, you have a sense of unity. There is also a basis for progression and social mobility. But the community also underpins the warning, mobility is not easy and is full of traps. Terry stands by as the commentator on all the passing trends and fads. He stoically watches as people appear to change but remain the same, move on only to return. The community is essentially self policing. Where the police do appear they are not welcome and they are certainly not a part of the local community. The nearest equivalents to the way the police are portrayed is the way most people feel about the tax man – and Arthur feels about the VAT inspector in particular. The police are bound by the formal code of the law, which is not subtle enough or flexible enough to cope with the pressures of the community. There can be hard definitions of what is acceptable only in the abstract terms of the law and these need delicate translation to the reality of the *Minder's* view of the world.

It is much tidier to deal with problems quickly and cleanly with Terry's fists than it is to take people to the courts which takes too long and does not have the same impact. The role of violence in the series is twofold: it both resolves conflict and it also underpins the masculine strengths of Terry's character. It is a man's world and the masculine virtues are emphasised in Terry's character. He is tough, he is strong *and* he is brave. In the logic of the series, this also makes him something else – he is sexually desirable. The early series, more so than the recent one, regularly cast Terry into the arms of adoring young women. The sexuality of the series has become one of its dominant features. Terry and the 'birds' and Arthur with the never-seen-but-often-heard-about 'her indoors' live out the two stereotypes of male sexuality. More, Terry's good fortune is envied by the older married man and this reinforces the sexist style of the series. Some of this tension is defused in joking exchanges but it is fundamentally reinforcing the worst traditions of gender relations in society. Yet this again cannot be removed from the context of the community without disturbing the familiar image which has been created.

It is the familiarity of the audience with the image and with the unease of the characters which, I think, can explain the popularity of the series. You have the experience of being put down by those who are, supposedly, your social superiors to draw on. You have agonised for the correct thing to say and got it wrong. What *Minder* offers you is the chance to see someone work out the angles and come out of it ahead of the game. There is a sense in which you are watching someone who could be you finally putting the record straight on your behalf. How many times have you thought of the witty response when it is too late to use it? Half the time Terry and Arthur do too. But then there is the second half of the programme for them to get even. They are pushing at the conventions of society and occasionally achieving something. The humour is *risque* and cheeky, especially where it is directed at outside authority. But they survive. It is a weekly witnessing of the survival of the downtrodden – with enormous contradictions. But that is why *Minder* is entertaining.

THE PRESSURE FOR PRIVATISING RADIO

Thomas O'Malley

Early this year the Government will invite public views on proposals to establish a new tier of 'community' radio stations on top of the existing system of BBC local and national and IBA local stations. In fact, the broad outline of future changes are already apparent and the likelihood is that by the end of the decade there will have been a growth of legalised small scale commercial radio. At the same time there will be a reduction of the controls exercised on behalf of the public by bodies like the IBA over the content of the material broadcast. Companies running these stations will no longer be required to provide their localities with a service which mixes speech and music and which 'informs, educates and entertains', but will simply be expected to

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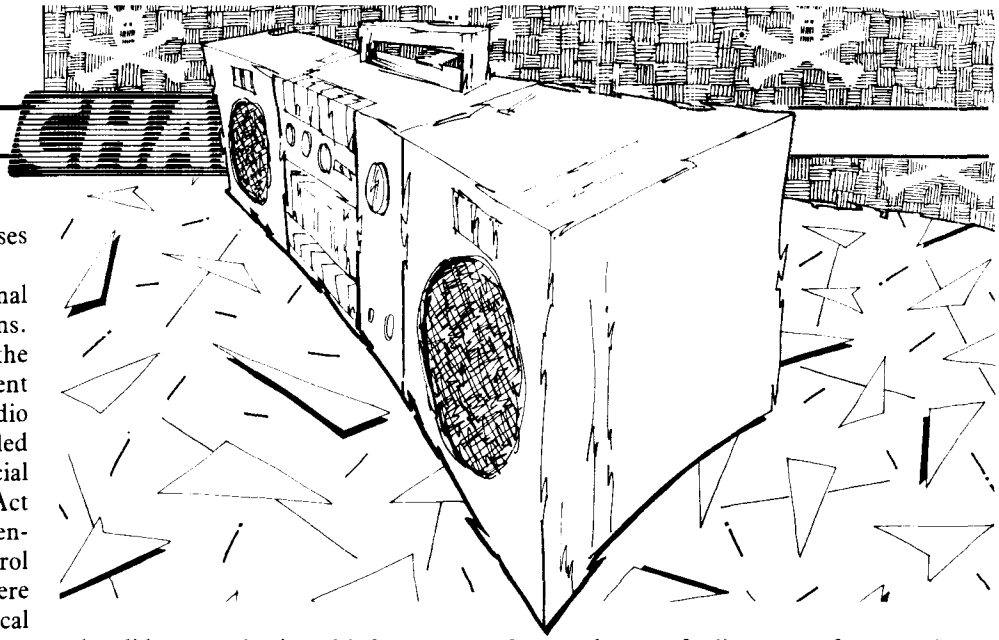

provide programming which maximises profits.

Until 1972 the BBC ran four national and a few experimental local radio stations. A campaign waged during the 1960s by the advertising, entertainment and equipment manufacturing industries, the pirate radio stations and Conservative MPs, succeeded in securing the introduction of commercial local radio. The Sound Broadcasting Act (1972) placed the new system of Independent Local Radio (ILR) under the control of the IBA. By the end of 1984 there were 48 commercial and over 30 BBC local stations.

Although these stations are meant to be local their output is largely the same across the country: pop music, DJ chatter, weather checks, public service announcements and, on ILR, advertisements. Critics have argued that the stations do not reflect the interests of the communities they are supposed to serve and have called, variously, for more accountability from existing stations or have looked to some form of 'community' radio as a solution. But the real pressure for change has come from quarters who want a relaxation of government controls and an expansion of commercial music-based radio. Both types of critics use the term 'community radio' to indicate the kind of change they want, even though they clearly want different things. But it is those critics arguing for an enlarged commercial radio network who are influencing policy in this area.

The factors which will govern the shape of the changes in radio have been at work for a number of years. The Thatcher government has shifted away from traditional Conservative Party support for public service principles in broadcasting and is itself under pressure from the Right within the Conservative Party who are arguing for deregulation of broadcasting. Pirate radio stations have campaigned for deregulation and, on this point, are in broad agreement with ILR companies organised through the Association of Independent Radio Contractors (AIRC). Even the IBA has agreed to demands from the AIRC for less regulation, and it wants to see a growth of small-scale commercial radio.

In fact, the Conservatives are encouraging the rapid expansion of new communications technologies (cable, satellite) under private ownership where possible, and with the minimum amount of public discussion or regulation. The Hunt Report (1982) advocated the establishment of a privately financed cable system, 'regulated' by an authority with few powers of control over programme content, in marked contrast to the obligations laid on the IBA. In the past major innovations in broadcasting have been preceded by relatively detailed public inquiries (Pilkington, Annan). However, the Hunt Report marked, in the speed of its compilation and the brevity and partiality of its final form, a clear departure from customary practice, and drove a coach and horses through traditional notions that broadcasting should be regulated in accordance with public service principles to ensure universal availability, a high standard and a wide range of educative and entertaining programming.

The BBC will have to defend itself more vigorously as the pressure from the Tory Right for stronger measures increases. The Adam Smith Institute has argued that the BBC should take advertising and that the IBA should lose many of its current powers over programme content. The Institute goes on to argue that there should be an expansion of commercial radio so as to 'encourage truly local radio stations – perhaps serving no more than a few thousand listeners, run on small budgets with largely voluntary staff and charging advertising rates affordable even by one man *(sic)* businesses. . . With liberalisation of the existing licensing arrangements, a true freedom of choice will come to exist.'[1] Any discussion about the expansion of commercial local radio will inevitably call into question the very existence of publicly financed BBC local radio.

Pressure for deregulation from outside the Conservative Party has come from the rapid growth of pirate radio since 1981. Estimates of their numbers vary from 50 to 100, some lasting only a few weeks. The claims the pirates make for audience figures are hard to check, but a recent survey has called into question the assumption that pirates are poaching large numbers of listeners from existing stations.[2] The offshore pirates, *Caroline* and *Laser* play continuous pop music and hope to reap substantial profits by selling advertising spots to American companies wishing to reach a large European market. On land, in spite of the odd progressive station (eg *Breakfast Pirate Radio* in London), the bulk of pirates are simply claiming to satisfy a market for music and small scale advertising not catered for by the BBC or IBA. These include stations such as *Horizon*, *Skyline*, *JFM*, *London Greek Radio* and *Radio Jackie*, which are frequently run as small businesses. Because they operate illegally, don't pay rental for transmitters or copyright fees and are run largely by unpaid labour, they can keep their costs low. Some receive free records from record companies anxious to promote their wares even though they know copyright is not being paid.

In fact, the main function of radio piracy has been to bolster the case for deregulation and more commercial radio. Meanwhile, with radio audiences declining and increased competition for advertising revenue from cable and TV AM, the AIRC have lobbied the Government for a relaxation of controls over their activities. Last June, it asked the Government to allow ILR companies to be able 'to trade with the same degree of freedom as other commercial enterprises'. This meant dismantling the IBA's powers over programming, broadcasting hours, shareholdings, advertising and diversification – controls built into the Broadcasting Act to inject a degree of accountability into the commercial radio system. Once these have gone, the AIRC would be happy to see an increase in commercial radio stations.

Once upon a time these demands would have stood little chance of a sympathetic hearing at the IBA. But things have changed since John Whitney, former managing director of Capital Radio, became

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Director General of the IBA in 1982. Whitney makes no secret of the fact that he would like to push the Authority's relationship with the companies away from that of a regulator and its servants. 'I like the word partnership' he said. 'It is much more indicative of the role in which I would like to see the IBA viewed in the next ten years'.[3]

Under Whitney this partnership has already begun to develop. The IBA has fostered the growth of regional (as opposed to local) stations by encouraging mergers (Gwent and CBC) and granting new franchises to established neighbouring companies. (Hereward recently got the Northampton franchise). Restrictions on sponsorship have been eased and the networking of programmes to attract national advertisers has been encouraged. Last November the Authority announced a package of concessions to the AIRC which amounts to a giant step along the road to deregulation. Companies are to be allowed much greater leeway on hours of broadcasting, share structures, advertising copy, clearance and diversification of activities. Rentals are to be reduced by 10% and the Authority is to press the Government to reduce the taxes on station profits. Savings are to be made by reducing the amount of supervisory work done by the IBA through its regional offices, its local advisory committees and its machinery for dealing with educational and religious programming on ILR. Regulation, claims the IBA, will remain intact but will be administered with 'a lighter touch'.

So the Government's proposals to change the radio airwaves will be shaped by a combination of factors. The precise detail of the changes may not exactly fit the picture outlined, but there can be little point in supporting the developments as they seem to be emerging. For the diverse, accessible and accountable mass audience radio system which many in the labour movement would like to see will not emerge out of the present climate. In fact, the likelihood is that by the 1990s radio in the UK will, along with other forms of mass communication, be run on principles similar to those operating in Fleet Street.

The proposals present the Left with a serious challenge because they are about the wider movement towards deregulation in broadcasting. Our traditional response has been to favour off-the-peg alternatives to the existing system, like community radio, and leave the mass broadcasting organisations to their own devices. This is clearly not adequate to the task. Effective responses to the proposals must address the impact of any changes on the whole of radio broadcasting and also the effect of deregulating commercial radio on the controls governing ITV and BBC TV and radio. Campaigning against deregulation and the expansion of privatised radio has to be one part of a process which simultaneously, confidently and coherently, asserts the need for, and extension of, public control, not just over radio but throughout the broadcast sector. These proposals provide us with the challenge of meeting the aggressive incursions of the broadcasting free marketeers with their first serious challenge in six years of Tory rule. It is important that we meet them head on and do not concede to their attempts to push radio into the open market.

[1] *Omega File: Communications* Adam Smith Institute (London 1984) p 41-2.

[2] Pirates Over-Rated *Broadcast* 17/8/84.

[3] D Taylor Changing Face of the IBA *Broadcast* 6/1/84.

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Retreating from reality

Class Politics: An Answer to its Critics
Ben Fine, Laurence Harris, Marjorie Mayo, Angela Weir, Elizabeth Wilson, £1.50

Since 1979 the Left in Britain has suffered a number of serious setbacks. The amazing resilience of the men and women of the coalfields is evidence of our capacity to sustain an alternative vision within the depths of economic recession, and despite Thatcher's political onslaught. Even now, however, the response at all levels of our movement is much weaker than is required to match the careful preparation and determination of the Tories. One of the strengths of Marxism is its capacity to confront reality and ask why events have occurred. However there is little agreement on the difficulties facing the Left, or the strategies we should adopt. The reason for these differences and for the increasing sharpness with which they are being expressed rests within the history of the Left generally, and more specifically for our purposes here, of the British Marxist tradition.

From the late 20s until the end of the 50s the terms of the debate between British Marxists were largely determined by the split between Stalin and Trotsky, although there was much common ground. But, particularly after 1956 and the revelations of Stalin's abuse of power, the Communist Party gradually began an examination of the relationship between socialism and democracy.

Particularly important theoretically has been the work of the Italian Marxist Gramsci. The Gramscian view of bourgeois society is that it is a system of domination through hegemony, that is consent won through ideological struggle in every aspect of civil society. It follows that the struggle of the working class for socialism cannot be confined to the capturing of state power. The working class has also to build hegemony in civil society, crucial to which is the construction of alliances with social movements representing forces within and outside the working class. By such means, the working class needs to elaborate around itself a popular, democratic majority.

Within this framework the working class clearly remains, because of the pivotal role of class in our society, the *only* force capable of bringing about socialism. Its fulfillment of that role, however, is not inevitable. It depends on the capacity of the working class to be conscious of its role and to engage in a political and ideological struggle for national leadership. To this end, the labour movement must engage on a terrain wider than class, and be sensitive to and intervene in other contradictions in society, for example race, gender, nation.

These ideas informed the CP's strategy document *The British Road to Socialism* adopted in 1977. A strategy for building a broad democratic alliance is set out, on the basis of which could be achieved 'a Labour government of a new type' capable of implementing, in concert with this popular bloc, a democratic transformation of the state and social relations. Although this strategy contained quite new elements, in many ways it also carried forward and gave a sharper theoretical edge to the broad non-sectarian communist tradition dating, outstandingly, from the building of popular fronts against fascism in the 30s.

However, a minority within the Communist Party saw *The British Road to Socialism* as an abandonment of class politics, and as a terrible betrayal. In their view Marxism is an unchanging truth contained in the classical Marxist texts. The tablets merely needed to be handed down and applied. The role of the working class in achieving socialism is seen as predetermined and imminent because of the historic contradiction between capital and labour. Moreover, all contradictions in society are ultimately reducible to this contradiction, so that popular and democratic movements are reduced to instruments to further the class struggle. They reject the notion of an alliance between popular democratic forces and seek to replace it with the idea of an anti-monopoly alliance, based mainly on economic struggles. This minority opposition see themselves as upholding a communist tradition which they believe has been betrayed by the leadership of the Communist Party. Ironically – or not so ironically – their views remain very similar to those of the Trotskyist Left.

Class Politics: An Answer to its Critics attempts to use the language developed in the notion of the broad democratic alliance. But like the present editors of the *Morning Star*, who have recently published extracts from the pamphlet, they do so only in order to present a quite different kind of politics. In fact the pamphlet is the most comprehensive statement of the minority opposition in the Communist Party.

The pamphlet takes as its starting point the assertion that 'the newer left', which they define very loosely and vaguely, but, it would appear, is mainly seen as centring on *Marxism Today*, has abandoned 'the central role of class and class conflict'. But in fact the centrality of class in their pamphlet amounts to little more than an assertion that the working class has an interest in achieving socialism. In other words, it's back to the old idea of false consciousness – the working class is not revolutionary because it's been 'misled'. Correct leadership and slogans are all that the working class awaits. Of course, given this approach and taken at that level of abstraction, the changes in the character, composition and culture of the working class in the postwar period seem irrelevant. That is why they remain unexplored by the authors.

The political strategy proposed in the pamphlet amounts to little more than a programme based on the traditional themes: a strong central state, a planned economy along Soviet lines, and a greater commitment to the Soviet Union internationally. They pay lip service, but no more, to the critique of socialist democracy developed by Communists and others, which is vital not only to understanding those societies but also to any conception of socialism in Britain. And they operate with a simplified version of society, wholly interpreted in terms of the economic class struggle.

They write, for example, 'the *only* basis for unity between black and white *must* be an analysis of racism as a class issue in which an understanding of the role of imperialism is particularly crucial' (my ital TD). Similarly we are told that, 'the mobilising potential for women is greatest, in the first instance, for the general economic issues, that are in the process of change, those concerning employment and wages. . .' This claim seems quite extraordinary in the light of the diversity of women's politics.

The chapter on feminism highlights many of the pamphlet's deficiencies. It is critical of most developments in the women's movement. Astonishingly, a substantial portion of it is devoted to a critique of *m/f*, a feminist journal with a tiny academic circulation. They use this critique to assert that all socialist feminism has become 'post Marxist' feminism. They give radical feminists a pat on the back for 'insisting on an institutional critique of male power', but systematicaly condemn all socialist feminists who have tried to

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integrate the insights of feminism into a Marxist analysis. Because they themselves cannot come to terms with an analysis that is based on anything other than a narrow, economic view of class, they assume that those that are trying to do so are engaged in a conspiracy totally to banish women from class relations. Similarly, those that are trying to construct a theoretical basis to understand the relationship between the labour movement and the women's movement, that is those who are exploring the concept of alliances within the working class movement, are caricatured as trying 'to justify the creation of a new mass electoral alliance around the Labour Party. . .'

It seems clear that because *they* cannot understand the relationship between sex and class, except in the restricted domain of the workplace, they condemn all those who are trying to explore this fruitful area.

Creating a popular feminism which can relate to and help transform the lives of women, the majority of whom who are working class, is still an urgent priority, but it is a project which is well under way. Feminism *has* already changed the lives of thousands of battered women, for example, and created a new awareness amongst women of their own worth. Not least, although some sections of the Left have attempted to characterise the Women Against Pit Closures movement as separate from feminism, it would have been inconceivable without the wider context of the women's movement including, for example, Greenham. Thousands of women in the coalfields have been able to offer the most valuable support to the NUM, and to develop their own organisations, demands and strategies, to begin to understand that feminism is not as irrelevant as it is often made out to seem by the media and by anti-feminists on the Left.

And yet the authors can seriously regret that we have not yet achieved 'any significant mobilisation of women workers such as occurred around the Equal Pay Act and to some extent around the Working Women's Charter.' They account for this by citing 'another major theme in current feminist writing, the critique of trade unions as male dominated bargaining units'. They say that this has divided feminists from working class women. No doubt all of this will come as a surprise to the many active trade union feminists who may recall the campaign to protect the 1967 Abortion Act, and who have some knowledge of campaigning to implement the policies on issues like sexual harassment.

The authors have defined what they are looking for in such a narrow way that they are blind to many of the creative developments in the working class movement.

Because they look at the class struggle in an abstract, unhistorical way, the authors are dismissive of attempts, particularly in *Marxism Today*, to account for the specific nature of the current political crisis. They regard the notion of Thatcherism as a figment of our imagination. Since they do not accept that the Left and working class movement is engaged in a battle for people's ideas in every area of society, they are not interested in the particular set of ideas that we are contesting. Thus Thatcher is an embodiment of the class enemy, and that is all that needs to be said. They are simply not interested in understanding why the new dominating forces in the Conservative Party have been able to win popular support.

In fact, they maintain that there has been no shift to the right in the working class. It is not so much that the ideological battle has been won by Thatcher, but that we have been betrayed by Labour. Labour has 'not been willing to harness and represent the interests of the working people (which always remain the same? -TD) in industrial and economic planning, a path which would have involved an intense challenge to the power of the City and the multi-nationals.' Their assumption is that the working class is already programmed for socialism and all that is necessary is to press the correct buttons to trigger the response. The reality is far more complex.

The main evidence for their claim that the working class is in a strong and healthy state, ready to win socialism, is the increase in trade union membership in the 70s. But they don't give any consideration to the thought that this has been largely a defensive reaction. The regularisation of pay bargaining in the 70s and, more recently, fear of redundancy and concern at deterioration of conditions of service, have been significant in determining attitudes towards trade union membership. These concerns are not at all at odds with support for the individualistic values of Thatcherism. Nor do they necessarily lead to loyalty to trade unions as organisations or to an understanding of the political role of trade unions. As Peter Hain has recently pointed out (November 1984 MT), 'The Post Office Engineering Union is the only major union to affiliate to the Labour Party in the postwar period. Recent ballots by NALGO in 1982 and the CPSA in 1983 showed majorities of 8 to 1 and 2 to 1 respectively against establishing political funds and Labour links.' A MORI opinion poll conducted for Trade Unions for a Labour Victory shows that in only three affiliated unions – the EEPTU, the NUM and the UCW – do the majority of members want to retain the link with Labour and the payment that goes with it. None of this is inevitable. Membership of a union *does* create the conditions for a process of politicisation through formal and informal education and collective action. But this is a process of construction. It is not simply a question of 'harnessing' or 'representing' a pre-existing consciousness.

The changes that have taken place in the composition of the working class since the war, and the break-down of the economic and political basis for the traditional Keynesian programme of the Labour Party have led to a political crisis for the whole labour movement. Our failure to adapt to the new situation has seriously contributed to the popularity of Thatcherism. New ideas and initiatives are urgently needed on the Left, if we are to build a movement that is capable of challenging the new Right's ideological grip. In arguing that 'the mixture as before' is sufficient, the authors of *Class Politics* have opted out of this struggle. Indeed, they deny that such a crisis of the Left exists.

Ben Fine and his co-authors think it is pessimistic to argue the need for change. Indeed the use of phrases like 'class collaborationist' to describe those authors in *Marxism Today* and elsewhere who have called for a radical reappraisal of the Left's analysis and strategy suggests that we are to be seen as little better than the class enemy. They would do well to remember that it is a principle of Marxism that it is the masses, *not slogans*, or rhetoric, who make history. The point of revolutionary politics after all is not to hunt out heretics (or worse) on the Left, but to understand where people and society are at, and on that basis find forms of broad mass *struggle* through which more and more people can come to understand the meaning of socialism and its relevance to their own lives, to build a practice that takes account of where people are now, as well as where we would like them to be. This is a more *hopeful* starting point from which to develop mass action than the belief that the answers are only to be found in our own heads.

Tricia Davis

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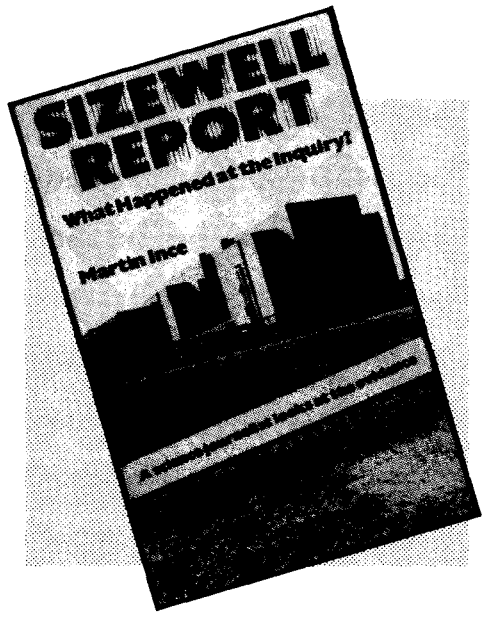
The Sizewell Saga

Sizewell Report
Martin Ince *Pluto £3.95*



In 1956, the inquiry into the proposed nuclear power station at Bradwell in Essex took three days. On 11 January, the inquiry into the proposed Pressurised Water Reactor at Sizewell in Suffolk enters its third year. What should we make of this way of reaching decisions?

For the Central Electricity Generating Board to have to defend its plans in public in such detail is, at first sight, a model of democracy. The objectors to Sizewell have done well, even though they have a mere fraction of the CEGB's resources. Yet the length of the inquiry has made it a closed book to most of us. Independent citizens who have the time and the expertise to wade through the proceedings can probably be counted on one hand. So Martin Ince has done us a service. His lucid book summarises the arguments that dominated the first half of the inquiry. He tackles both the science and the economics of the PWR, though you don't have to be either a scientist or an economist to understand the book.

But why should anyone care about Sizewell? At stake, as Ince shows, is the whole future of Britain's energy policy. Should electricity be generated increasingly by a novel nuclear technology imported from America? Or should it, as at present, come mainly from British coal? These are the questions at the heart of Sizewell.

Put it another way: a history of the coal industry written in the year 2000 will probably give as much weight to Sizewell as to the miners' strike. The inquiry is filling the vacuum left by the Government's refusal to set out, let alone defend, its energy policy.

What emerges from Ince's book, though this isn't his intention, is the impossibility of reaching definitive conclusions. Asking whether Sizewell is economic makes as little sense as asking whether pits are economic. At what rate will the British and world economies grow? What will happen to energy demand and to electricity's share of it? How quickly will the prices of oil and coal rise? What will be the trend of exchange rate movements, particularly between the pound and the dollar? These are a few of the questions that have to be answered *well into the next century* if we are to know whether a PWR programme is 'economic' (and hence whether many pits are 'uneconomic'). Something has to bridge this uncertainty gap if any decisions are to be made. Increasingly, that something is politics.

'Nuclear power no thanks' is now one of the Left's jumble of ideas. But things aren't that straightforward. True, the electricians' union, led by Eric Hammond, bastion of the Right, is virulently pro-nuclear – but so too is AUEW-TASS, led by Ken Gill, doyen of the Left. True, right-wing governments in the west have a crush on nuclear power – but so too does the Soviet Union.

So in what sense is it politically correct to oppose nuclear power? Not, I think, because of safety. Though there are unresolved problems about disposing nuclear waste, safety is essentially a technical issue. So far, nuclear power has been at least as safe as coal or oil.

But there are two political reasons for opposing nuclear power. The first is its murky relationship with nuclear weapons. One witness calculated that the Sizewell PWR will yield 1000 warheads' worth of plutonium. The second argument is the employment and economic consequences of nuclear power. The miners' strike and Sizewell are two sides of the same coin. The Government wants nuclear power to diminish the power of the miners. Many coal-fired stations are due to retire in the next 20 years. They will be replaced by PWRs if the Government gets its way.

What is insufficiently appreciated is that the miners can hardly win at Sizewell. The main objectors to the PWR, as Ince makes clear, argued that coal could be cheaper than nuclear power if old coal mines were closed, if coal output was concentrated in a few modern super-pits and if the floodgates were opened to cheap coal imports. Heard that before?

In theory, the Sizewell inspector could conclude that energy conservation, or converting oil-fired to coal-fired power stations, or renewable energy sources, or coal-based Combined Heat and Power are all preferable to Sizewell. It's a safe bet he won't. The best hope, from an anti-nuclear position, is that he will turn down the PWR, but give the green light for the home-grown Advanced Gas Cooled reactor. This is still nuclear power, but it would set back CEGB planning for years.

The more likely outcome is that the inspector will give the PWR the go-ahead, but with a number of tough-sounding safety conditions. The job of the anti-nuclear Left will then be to make so much fuss that the Government has to delay the final decision till after the next election. That is the next campaign if you back the miners.

David Thomas

'The people do not bear sufferings, such as they bore when the army occupied the Transkei, without becoming steeled in their determination to re-group, re-examine their methods of struggle, develop new ones, and retain the spirit that seeks forever for freedom.'
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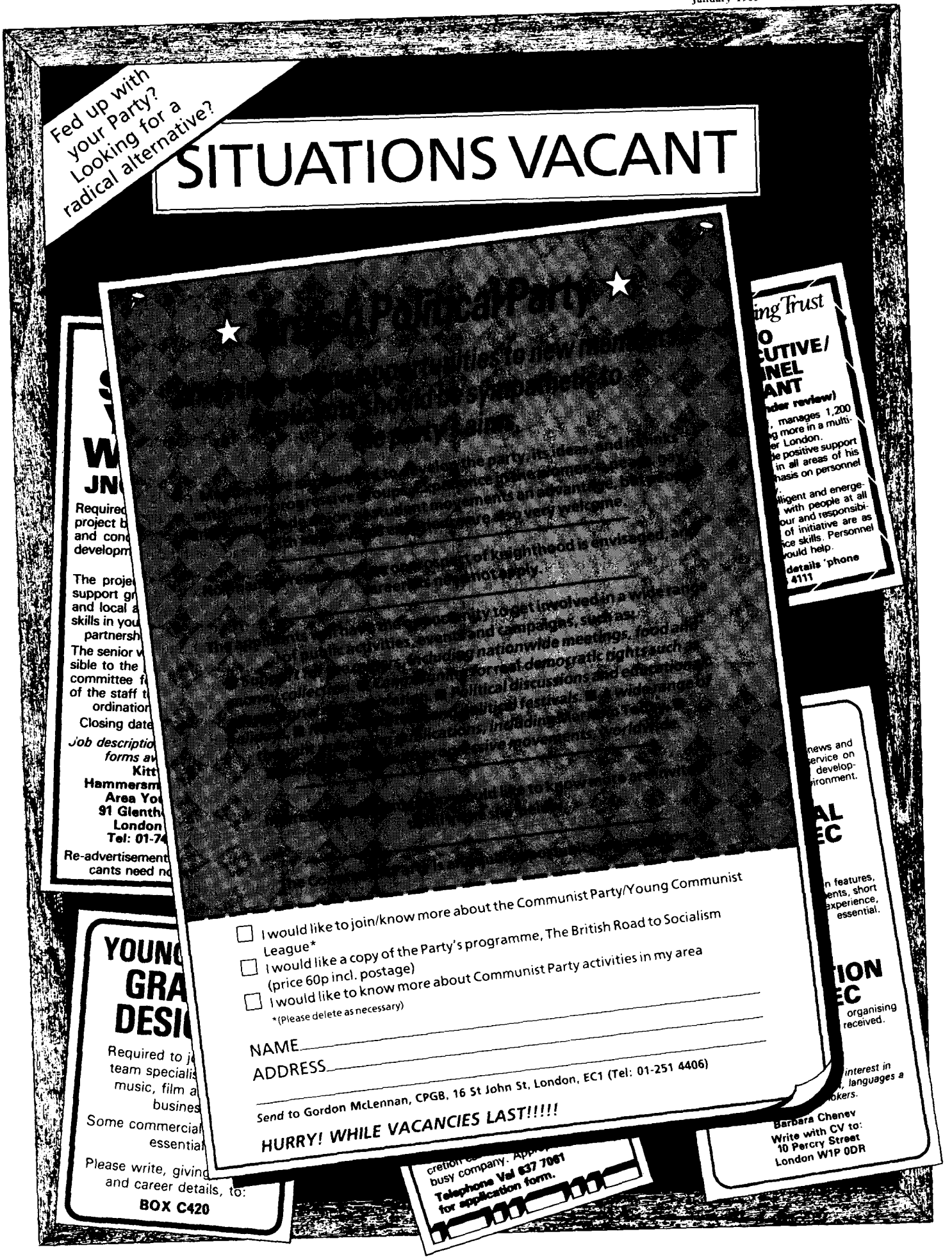
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VIEWPOINT

● **Tariq Ali returns to fundamentals.**

● **Henry Neuberger finds merit in established economic models.**

TARIQ ALI
Politics and pyramids

I would like to reply to Beatrix Campbell's demagogic attack on my interview book with Ken Livingstone, *Who's Afraid of Margaret Thatcher?*

She is made uneasy by Ken Livingstone's concept of an alliance of the dispossessed, or as he puts it in the book, 'a coalition which includes skilled and unskilled workers, unemployed, women and black people as well as the sexually oppressed minorities.' She would prefer a radical alliance based on the rejection or exclusion of any class definition. She then seizes on this political difference to caricature and amalgamate all who refuse to accept her rejection of class politics. Can she really suppose that I am in league with the white male power holders in the labour movement, or that Kinnock feels 'wonderful' about the support for Benn, Scargill and Livingstone in the wider movement?

She only forestalls a sense of the ludicrous about all this by attributing 'tawdry elitism' and 'fundamentalism' to her opponents and denying the capacity for transformation through struggle in the labour movement. Has not the miners' strike shown her the mistake she made in her book, *Wigan Pier Revisited*, where she portrays the NUM as incapable of rising above economism and male chauvinism? And in the very week her article appeared the women machinists at Fords, many of them black, were also belying her pessimism concerning the inherent limitation of the labour movement – 'the men's movement' as she insists on calling it – by leading a vital struggle for equal pay, and obliging their male union leaders to choose whether or not to support them.

The attack on fundamentalist elitism is demagogic because even the most radical libertarian has to try to be more enlightened, active and organised than the mass of citizens. The only way to avoid this charge would be to sink into complete passivity and agnosticism. The vital point is whether the activist has a basic and informed commitment to socialist democracy and popular sovereignty. Mandel, whose pamphlet on Leninism Campbell distorts so wilfully, makes it quite clear that the revolutionary vanguard must learn from mass resistance to capitalism and must encourage the building of genuinely democratic institutions of proletarian power.

In Mandel's schema the 'revolutionary nuclei' are actually on the bottom and the masses on the top – the 'pyramid' to which Campbell refers is actually upside down and illustrates the impact of class action on consciousness. These days Leninist organisation is not fashionable in many areas of the Left and no doubt Campbell's ignorant jibes about revolutionary 'schooling' will find a receptive audience. Yet these supposedly elitist Leninist organisations, whatever their imperfections, have been real schools for their working class membership, allowing them to develop themselves as organisers, speakers, writers and leaders, to become, in fact, working class, socialist intellectuals.

As an alternative to Leninism and the labour movement Campbell recommends the popular planning projects and commit-

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tees of the GLC. She declares that the women's committees have done more for millions of women in London than those she calls the 'Three Musketeers' – one of whom is Livingstone – and people like Mandel who support them. This is wrong not simply because she fails to acknowledge the political battles which made the GLC possible – the 'boring' struggle of the new Labour Left. It is also wrong because the 'new politics' of giving money to autonomous groups, if divorced from a wider anti-capitalist, anti-racist and anti-sexist project, would soon resemble the rather familiar 'old politics' of clientelism as practised by any bourgeois politician in the United States or Italy.

Of course, the GLC is right to fund women's groups, black groups, gay groups and workers' co-ops. But it would be truly elitist to suppose that this is the only way to mobilise or to believe that such projects can be long sustained without class politics and general socialist advance. Such funding is bound to be very limited while capitalist governments remain in power, and will reach only a minority.

No doubt all the above will seem the sheerest fundamentalism to Campbell. Anyone seriously opposed to capitalism, it appears, is a fundamentalist and must be vigorously denounced. The fact that Livingstone is prepared actually to talk to 'fundamentalists' is cause for deep worry and suggests to Campbell that he is a crypto-fundamentalist himself.

Campbell finds the new Labour Left and its struggle 'boring' and feels that the interviews reveal a 'promiscuous alliance' between myself and Livingstone. She fears that the Labour Party, under the influence of Livingstone, Benn and Scargill may be about to become a fundamentalist party, and that this will be a betrayal of the cultural revolution on the Left in the last decade. Evidently she has failed to register that, to differing degrees, the 'Three Musketeers' have been influenced by the new movements for social emancipation – but without losing their commitment to the politics of socialism and class struggle. No doubt this progress is uneven but let us salute the fact that the NUM, alone of the major unions, actually supported the demands of women, blacks and gays at the latest Labour Party conference.

While I disagree with Bea Campbell's politics I remain a great admirer of her talents as a journalist and writer. I look forward to the day when these talents, themselves nourished by work for the labour movement, are used to promote the cause of all the exploited and oppressed.

HENRY NEUBURGER
Babies and bathwater

John Grahl wants a new kind of economic policy. The most important thing about it is that it is new. He does not describe the kind of left economic policy he wants to replace. Nor do we find out what the new policy is going to be – except that a lot of people are going to be in temporary job creation schemes while it comes into effect.

John's criticisms of traditional Keynesian economic policy are well founded and familiar. No serious policies of the Left have ever advocated simple Keynesianism. Left policies have nearly always emphasised the need for structural change and the need to tackle the problems of inflation and the balance of payments, to which John refers – as well as the need to advance democracy in the workplace, and for equality. Left policy makers have never been under any illusion as to the inadequacy of Keynesianism to address the underlying political obstacles to a fair and efficient society.

What has to be avoided is confusing the inadequacy of simple Keynesian policies with the argument that it is impossible for governments to stimulate production and create jobs. This argument is advanced by what John calls the neo-liberals – what I am used to calling Tories or monetarists or Thatcherites. John appears to be in danger of accepting the argument.

None of the changes that John describes have invalidated the simple truth that if governments employ people to produce something – whether it is health care or defence or digging coal – the result will be more jobs and output in those industries and more jobs and output in the industries which supply those industries and the workers who work in them.

If governments use this method of creating jobs it will certainly cause additional economic and political pressures. But there is no evidence that they will reverse the initial benefit. One illustration of this is the reverse process in Britain, where government cuts have been extremely effective in destroying jobs, and, as John points out, no spontaneous recovery has come to replace them.

A more striking illustration is the recent American experience. John is right to say that it is being held up as a vindication of neo-liberal economic policy. It is not correct as John does to combat this argument by denying that the US economy is successful. Reagan has certainly intensified poverty and dangerously increased defence spending, but in terms of economic growth and job creation the US is now more successful than it has been for three decades. What we must point out is that this recovery is the consequence of successful job creation by the state, and not the result of supply side economics.

In Reagan's first two years, his government adopted policies indistinguishable from Mrs Thatcher's with similarly disastrous consequences for output, jobs and poverty. But at the end of 1982, US policies were completely reversed. Partly because of defence spending, but far more as a result of increases in health spending and tax cuts, the US embarked on a traditional Keynesian reflation.

The neo-liberals in the US and Europe predicted disaster. In the event, Keynesians were vindicated and neo-liberals confounded. The budget deficit has stimulated the US economy. Of course the US is able to do this because of its dominant position in world capital markets. But it has become a net debtor because much of the capital in the rest of the world has little other productive use. The Americans are getting genuine productive assets for their borrowings. Mrs Thatcher is very proud of Britain's build-up of overseas assets. British pension funds will own some of those US assets but we shall have little productive capacity of our own.

John's description of the 'obsolete Keynesian' model is unrecognisable. The economic growth of the 50s and 60s was based as much on the growth of public and private services, of increased opportunities for women to work, and of international trade as on manufacturing productivity growth. Certainly the productivity of manufacturing industry appeared to grow rapidly during this period, but that is partly because it is easier to measure. Manufacturing productivity in the last year or two – at least in Britain and the US – is growing as rapidly as it did at any time in the Keynesian past.

Of course John is right that we must continually reappraise our economic policy. But we must replace the old only when we actually believe it to have been wrong and have something better to replace it with. In time I hope we shall but so far I don't think John has provided sufficient grounds for doing so.

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Letters

FUNDING OBSESSION

Why should those trade union members – in a majority or a minority – who have no current desire to support the Labour party, vote to establish a political fund which, in electoral terms, would be used in support of that party alone?

Is there not a better logic in arguing, accurately, that the threat to the quality of life of most union members is so fierce that abandoning exclusive support for Labour and thereby making it possible to give financial aid to other parties, if members so wish, would make a ballot victory for the establishment of a political fund in every union far more likely?

Labour's jealous obsession with the need to secure the whole loaf may well result in it getting no bread, to the detriment of trade unionists generally.

Michael Meadowcroft MP, House of Commons

FUNDAMENTALS

We were glad to see you turning your attention to the big business of creating fashion, in your interview with Jeff Banks of the Warehouse [*MT* November] but very disappointed with the absence of any examination of what fashion is, how it influences us, and why it earns Jeff Banks such a lot of money.

Maybe some of Jeff Banks' Warehouse designs are viewed as revolutionary within the fashion world, but to get a picture of any depth, you need to stand back from that world and examine the image-creating promises which keep the fashion industry thriving, and keep women (us) anxiously observant of what it's doing. If Jeff Banks makes money out of selling clothes to women, he is undoubtedly conscious of these promises; and of the converse side too: the threat of losing out socially and sexually if our vigilant observation of fashion is too relaxed. Some questioning on these fundamentals would have been appropriate, since the interview appeared in *Marxism Today* and not *Vogue* magazine.

Terry Vermeulen, Women's Media Action

PASSING COMMENT

Kinnock states [MT October]: 'Mrs Thatcher is irrational. Public enterprise is the guy with the black hat on and private enterprise is the guy with the white hat on'. It seems that for the Labour Party leadership black is definitely *not* beautiful.

Dorothy Grey, Enfield, Middlesex.

BORING DIRGE

The criticisms of Simon Lockwood's Costello article [MT August] seem to hinge on two premises: why bother to criticise pop music when its sole function is to provide escapist fun; and in any case the artists are doing their best so leave them be!

In the first place there seems to be a contradiction inherent in these two positions; if it *is* only pop music, there is surely no way that a pop artist, in this case Elvis Costello, could become a hero figure of the Left.

To ignore pop music and its political implications leads us straight into the trap of thinking that politics is about Parties and Bad News, fit only for the humourless minority, whilst the sensible majority pursue their happy and fun-filled lives.

It is precisely *because* Costello is so revered on the left and has written some (exellent) overtly political songs that he is a worthy subject of criticism.

Dave Slater's assumption that 'socialist' music will necessarily be a boring dirge is countered by the wealth of exciting entertaining 'socialist' acts around today – John Cooper-Clarke, Popmatics, See You In Vegas, Redskins, Everythink But The Girl, Wyatt to name but a few.

Mary Dyson, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

COSMIX-UP

I have recently returned to Britain after a long time abroad and resumed my reading of the *Morning Star* and *Marxism Today*. Well, you can imagine my amazement when I learnt that Elvis Costello, the pop singer, had been appointed as the *Star*'s industrial correspondent. This comes as no surprise to me because, unlike some, I still think that the base and superstructure are not so autonomous and that there is some kind of dialectical relation between them. Anyway, with Elvis working for the *Star*, no one can accuse that paper of being guilty of living in the world of past dogmas.

Which brings me to the savage

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Letters

attack, nay, hatchet job, on poor Elvis [*MT* August]. I am sure that most of us realise, unlike Lockwood, that with all the goodwill in the world, some lose touch with their audience and with the times. Only recently have I myself discovered the government's new approach to industrial relations. I mean, who would have thought that horses could actually be used to help us get to work? Anyway, as Dave Slater reminds us, the pop world is a difficult enough place and it cannot come as such a big shock to realise that the workplace has spilled on to the streets. Which is why it is necessary not to ignore the class struggle but to widen the concept of class in such a way as to help us to successfully intervene in the class struggle. Rock and roll is no longer enough, Elvis. We have to improve our songs.

Stuart Weare, Watford

IMPRESSIONISM

Someone must have been pulling Paul Marshall's leg [*MT* December]. Anyone who knows anything about Welsh trade union history knows that 'Scotch Cattle' is not an epithet for Scottish blacklegs. It was the name taken by an illegal organisation of militant trade unionists devoted to making life miserable for blacklegs.

I lived nearly ten years in the Rhondda and never discovered the unerased hatred of the English that Paul Marshall speaks of. The passions that may still be stirred by memories of 1910 are of a class political character, not purely nationalistic.

But even apart from these factual criticisms, I don't personally feel that articles of this kind have a place in *Marxism Today*. The problem of getting Paul Marshall's 'Little Britain' to recognise what the miners' strike really means for them requires serious analytical treatment, not superficial journalistic impressionism.

Dave Priscott, Leeds.

NEW POSSIBILITIES

Marxism Today, and all who took part in the organisation of Left Alive, deserve the warmest congratulations on the outstanding success of the weekend. The consistently high level of the discussions together with the intensity of concentration and involvement by those attending made it for me by far the most striking event of this kind since the war. Those attending seemed mostly young (by my standards) – between the early twenties and early forties, though there were of course many older than that; but Left Alive clearly appealed to a very broad range of young people across the political spectrum on the left.

One aspect that deeply impressed me was the broad range of those taking part as speakers in the various sessions. Alongside Communist Party speakers and chairpersons were very many well-known figures such as Raymond Williams, Ken Livingstone and Tony Benn. The tone and character of the discussions were warmly cooperative and friendly in a common concern to identify problems and search for their solution. Although the session that I was involved in ('Breaking School Rules') was small compared to some, the discussion again was deeply serious and positive, involving some well-known Labour figures as well as Communists and others. Further, the organisation (with the possible exception of the crêche) seemed to operate without a hitch, while the facilities at the City University fitted the Conference requirements splendidly.

I believe that the extraordinary success of Left Alive opens up quite new possibilities for the future.

Brian Simon, Leicester

LEFT ALIVE: ONE VIEW. . .

I write to thank all those involved in the organisation of Left Alive. It was – from the visitor's point of view – an extremely interesting week-end, full of discussion of high quality and very purposeful and important. It was also a very successful shop window for the CP. The only criticism I would raise is that it was perhaps a pity that the 'Marxism For Beginners' session did not take place, and I believe it would be worthwhile attempting on future occasions.

Rupert Simon, Somerset.

. . .AND ANOTHER

Before everybody gets too excited about Left Alive and its success, I'd like to make a couple of critical points about it.

Firstly, I felt that the fact that you were in effect only able to go to one session per half-day only served to reinforce the traditional priorities of the Left. Despite the many potentially interesting and controversial sessions on offer, everybody understandably crowded those with the big-name speakers.

Surely a wider audience should have been aimed for than the City Limits/ New Statesman / Guardian readership, many of whom will go to such events year in year out without ever getting round to doing anything. And do we really need such clever-clever little titles?

Left Alive? It left me feeling politically dead depressed.

John Crossland, London.

LEFT LAMENT

I've had another response to the Left Alive event – it's been in the air ever since:

Such a lot of concern
on how to reach the masses
on how to convince the
working class to
join their struggle.

Such an unconvincing concern
it seems to me,
to discuss and debate
this dilemma,
then to leave the
conference chamber
all furrowed over a solution
and leave behind our
intention,
squashed juice cartons
screwed up chocolate wrappers,
for
guess who
to clean up.

Leanne Radojkovich, London

We welcome your letters for the February issue. They should be no longer than 250 words and arrive at the office not later than 11 January. The editor reserves the right to cut letters.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Rob Shepherd is lobby correspondent with Channel 4's *A Week in Politics*.
Melanie Beresford is a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*.
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Tony Benn is a member of the Labour Party National Executive Committee and MP for Chesterfield.
Stuart Hall is professor of sociology at the Open University.
Angela Carter is a novelist.
Keith Dixon teaches at Grenoble University and is a member of the Frech Communist Party.
Daniel Perraud teaches in Grenoble.
Johhny Wright works for the advertising agency Ayer Baker.
Brian Hopkin is a senior lecturer in sociology at City of London Polytechnic.
Alan Clarke works for the Central Policy Unit at South Yorkshire City Council.
Thomas O'Malley works for Local Radio Workshop.
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David Thomas is a journalist for *New Society*.
Tariq Ali is an editor of *New Left Review*.
Henry Neuberger is the economic adviser to Neil Kinnock.

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Update

NEWS

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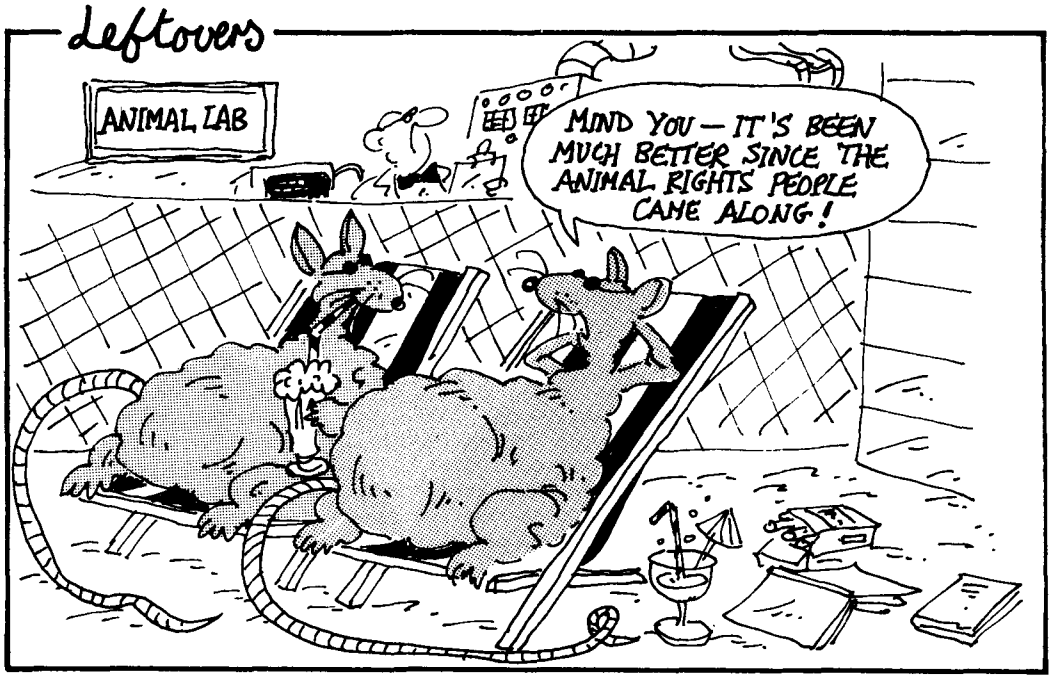
The Miners Case Labour Research Department pamphlet giving a clear straightforward account of the issues involved. 55p (10p to miners). LRD 78 Blackfriars Rd, London SE1 8HF (01-928 3649).

Information on Ireland Bulletin of the Communist Party number 8 is now on sale. Contents include 'The Guarantee' illusion or reality; Working Class Poetry; Plastic Bullets; The Birmingham Pub Bombings; TUC Report 1921; Tony Benn's Private Members Bill. 25p, or subscription rate £1.80 for six issues post free.

The New Right: The Men behind Mrs Thatcher. Under Mrs Thatcher the New Right has come in from the political cold and its ideas have moved right to the top of the serious political agenda. Written by Nigel Williamson, this pamphlet seeks to put the spotlight on these organisations and the people and the ideas behind them. Spokesman pamphlet 80p.

Trade Unions under Apartheid An examination of the impact of apartheid on the working lives of South Africa's black, 'coloured' and Indian populations. It catalogues the early struggles of the trade union movement, and focuses on the new wave unionism of the 1970s and 1980s. It concludes with a discussion of what the new developments in black independent trade unionism imply for international solidarity. Price 95p from Workers Educational Association, 9 Upper Berkeley St, London W1H 8BY.



CAMPAIGNS

Preserve Dartmoor. The Department of Transport has failed in its efforts to silence ten national and local organisations from presenting evidence against the Government's decision to route the A30 Okehampton by-pass through the Dartmoor National Park. This would desecrate northern Dartmoor. The issue will now be put before the Lords Joint Committee next month. To help write to your MP or send a contribution (so far it has cost £20,000) to Dartmoor Preservation Association, Bellover Youth Hostel, Postbridge, Yelverton.

Sheffield Policewatch An independent police monitoring group set up in April in the wake of mounting public concern about the way the miners' strike was being policed in local areas. It sends out teams of observers every morning to monitor policing at picket lines and roadblocks. Each team makes a report on everything it sees that day. At the end of the week, these daily reports are collated into summary weekly reports. Contact them at Sheffield 682408 or 704619.

CONFERENCES

Bournemouth and Beyond What's next for Liberal women 19 Jan. Day Conference to decide strategies for future action. Sessions on Patriarchy, Education, Health, Women in Development and UN decade for Women. 10-4.30pm at Friends Meeting House, Euston Rd. £5.00 (unwaged £1.00).

Beyond the Fragments Socialist Perspectives for Adult Education. 19 Jan. Day conference organised jointly by *Marxism Today* and the Communist Party National Education Advisory Committeee. To be opened by Brian Simon followed by workshops. 10-5.00 at County Hall, London SE1 £3.00 (£1 unwaged). Creche available. Contact Adult Education Conference, St John St, EC1 01 251 4406.

EVENTS

The Legality of Nuclear Weapons 3-6 Jan. A nuclear warfare tribunal organised by the Lawyers for Nuclear Disarmament. Evidence will be provided by a large number of international witnesses on the environmental and medical effects of nuclear attack, the legal implications, the current weaponry and strategies and the moral implications. Oliver Thompson Hall, City University, Northampton Sq, London EC1. Tickets £3.50 (unwaged £1.50). Contact Ross Mackenzie 01 272 9092.

GCHQ Action 25 and 26 Jan. To commemorate the anniversary of the Government's announcement of the trade union ban at GCHQ and as part of the continuing campaign to restore unions there, the Council of Civil Service Unions and the TUC have arranged a series of activities, including a march and rally at Cheltenham, with Norman Willis, and a rally in Scotland. Watch for further details.

FILMS, VIDEO

Who'll keep the Red Flag Flying Here? A group of Tyneside people discuss the issues during the 1983 General Election and talk frankly about the Labour Party. Made as part of the debate on the future of the Labour movement, it highlights the danger a party faces if it begins to take its support for granted. Available for sale or hire from The Northern Film and Television Archive, 36 Bottle Bank, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear NEB 2AR (0632 775532).

Entries for the February Update should be sent as soon as possible (latest date Friday 11 January) to Maria Loftus, Marxism Today 16 St John Street London EC1 or tel 01-608 0265 or 01-249 9509 (evenings). Space is limited, so if you want to guarantee that your entry is published we suggest that you book it into our classified columns under the appropriate heading. Ring Dave Kitson on 01-608 0265 for more details.

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Russian language courses in USSR

1985 language course programme will include courses of 3-12 weeks duration in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Volgagrad, Minsk, Dyuny, Vladimir and Kharkov which may be combined to provide a study period of up to six months in the Soviet Union between April and September. 1985 brochure will be available on request.

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